

THE KURDS VICTIMS OF CONVENIENCE

September 30 - October 13, 1996

# IN THESE TIMES

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Ignoble savages

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# FALL BOOKS

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## EDITORIAL

# TIME TO ABOLISH THE CIA

Since it was formed in 1947 as an instrument of the Cold War, the CIA has been used by one administration after another to violate the sovereignty of nations with which the United States was not at war. Time and again CIA operatives have conspired to overthrow foreign governments and to assassinate their political leaders. Any government or individual that refused to take orders from Washington, or that threatened the interests of American corporations, did so at their own risk. And many who remained loyal to their own people paid with their lives at the hands of CIA assassins.

The CIA has also waged an unacknowledged, though not really secret, war against our own people. In the name of protecting our national interests against godless communism, the CIA cultivated close relationships with drug syndicates around the world. This sordid record began in the '50s, when, as the *National Catholic Reporter* recently reminded us, the CIA collaborated with Corsican drug gangs to fight communist influence on the Marseilles waterfront. As a result, over the course of the following two decades the Corsicans became the main suppliers of heroin to the U.S. market. During the same period in Asia, the CIA helped the defeated Chinese Nationalists support themselves by turning northern Burma into the largest opium producer in the world. And in the '60s, the CIA set up an alliance with Mafia drug dealers in the United States in an ultimately futile effort to assassinate Fidel Castro.

This pattern of collaboration between the CIA and the drug mafia continued with a vengeance during the Vietnam War. The CIA secretly established its own airline, which it used to ferry arms to the Hmong tribe in supposedly neutral Laos and to carry opium from them to be sold on the world market as heroin. In the process, some 30,000 American servicemen became addicted during their tours in Indochina. By the early '70s, 70 percent of the heroin entering the United States and Western Europe originated from areas

controlled by CIA mercenaries.

Meanwhile, politicians and the criminal justice system have been inexorably escalating their efforts to curb the use of narcotics. So while the police launched a crusade against drug users and pushers in inner-city ghettos and the drug war became an article of faith among politicians, the nation's primary national security agency was secretly allied with the enemy.

Parts of this obscenely sordid story of subversion by a federal agency have been known for years. Indeed, numerous books have documented various aspects of CIA drug trafficking. And it is acknowledged that when Ronald Reagan entered office in 1981, the CIA was

used to organize an illegal war against the Sandinista government, which, under Lt. Col. Oliver North's watchful eye, was financed in part by drug sales.

Now, however, the *San Jose Mercury News* has taken the story a step almost beyond belief. In a special three-part series, the *Mercury News* documented CIA responsibility for starting the crack epidemic that has been plaguing inner-city ghettos since the mid-'80s. It all began when a Bay Area drug ring, led by two contra operatives, sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs in Los Angeles and funneled millions in drug profits to the war against the Sandinistas. This drug network, the *Mercury News* says, flooded Los Angeles with cut-rate cocaine that was then turned into crack, sparking a "crack explosion in urban America." (See "Crack in the mirror," page 21.) And it also provided the cash and connections

for the Crips and Bloods to buy automatic weapons for their own drug wars.

As the *Mercury News* points out, the effects of this CIA scheme are still reverberating in black communities throughout the country. Not only are communities being destroyed by destitute crack addicts, but thousands of young black men are now in prison for selling cocaine brought into their communities as a result of the CIA machinations.

The list of crimes committed by the CIA in the name of saving democracy is almost endless. And the damage the agency has done to the stability and well-being of other nations and our own is incalculable. Nor is this record balanced by accomplishments of any significance. Indeed, even as an information-gathering agency the CIA has time and again simply told administrations what they wanted to hear—from exaggerating the military and political strength of the former Soviet Union to impugning the mental health of Haiti's Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

Surely it's long past time to abolish the CIA. ◀

# IN THESE TIMES

"...with liberty and justice for all"

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# LETTERS

## A choice in Nicaragua

Your readers might conclude from Elizabeth Dore's "Rethinking the Sandinista legacy" (September 2) that the choice Nicaraguans will make on October 20 between conservative candidate Arnoldo Alemán and the Sandinistas' Daniel Ortega will be as meaningless as the choice people will face in this country two weeks later.

Alemán is a wholehearted proponent of the U.S.-sponsored economic program that Latin Americans refer to as "neoliberalism"—the policies that over the past six years have squeezed Nicaragua's agricultural production and driven hundreds of thousands of former campesinos into a job market kept artificially depressed by supposed anti-inflation measures. Alemán is planning to add the finishing touch: the development of a huge maquiladora "free zone" to make cheap Nicaraguan labor available to foreign investors.

In contrast, the Sandinistas are offering an essentially conservative program for restarting agricultural production through credits and lower taxes. They also advocate a public works project to make the infrastructural repairs required for renewed farm production, an initiative that will take the pressure off the unemployed (about 58 percent of the workforce).

What distinguishes this plan from the classic Latin American statist development model is a typically Sandinista thrust toward political participation, including a proposal to have the whole range of agricultural producers—from campesinos and collective farmers to wealthy ranchers—represented on an economic planning council. The Sandinistas are trying to give the plan political muscle by forming alliances with the business sectors squeezed by neoliberalism; they hope that these alliances can either help a Sandinista government implement its economic plan or, as seems more like-

ly, help a Sandinista opposition resist Alemán's neoliberal orgies.

The Sandinistas are not offering socialism, obviously, but they are at least making a considered effort to present a practical alternative to neoliberalism. Right or wrong, this effort deserves serious attention from people here in the United States, who are themselves about to experience the full horrors of neoliberal economics in the bipartisan "welfare reform."

David L. Wilson  
Weekly News Update  
on the Americas  
New York City

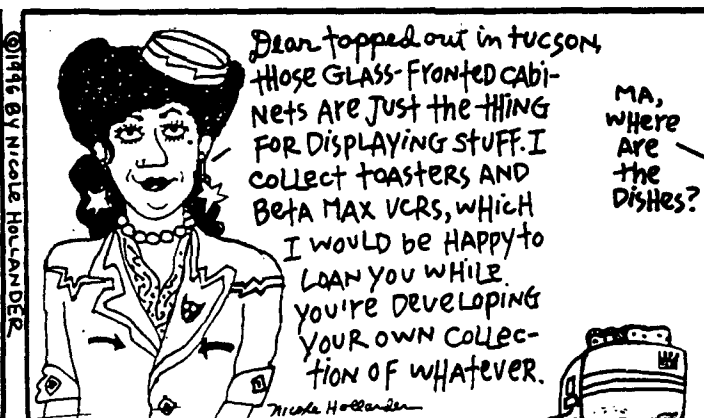
P.S. The article refers to Alemán's 30-point lead over Ortega. I assume this is an editing error. Most polls—for whatever polls are worth in Nicaragua—show Alemán leading by 10 points.

*Elizabeth Dore replies: I agree with David Wilson. The choice between Ortega and Alemán is not meaningless. My point is different: These elections are not about socialism—not even social democracy—versus capitalism, as many people outside Nicaragua believe. Nor is my purpose to blame the Sandinistas. Rather, it is to argue that the leaders of the FSLN have been swept along by the tide of history. For various reasons, they have been unable to reverse it.*

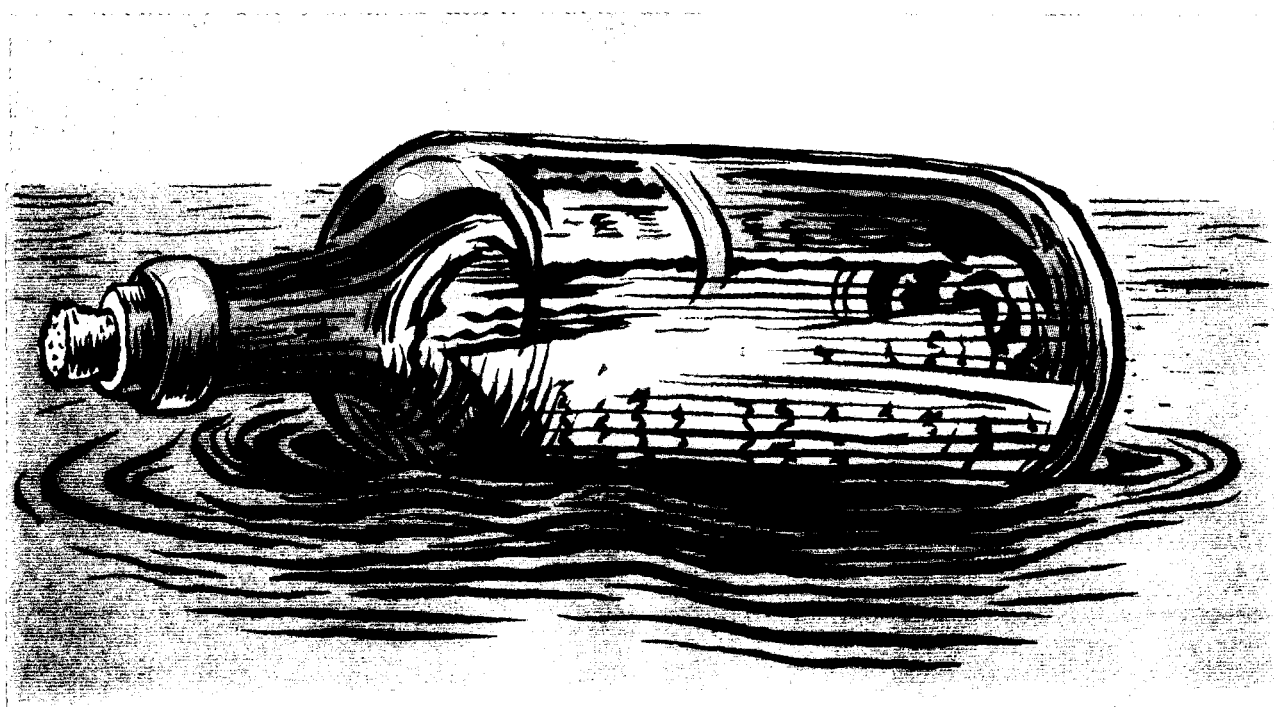
*After losing the elections of 1990, the FSLN leadership debated whether to establish an alliance with the*

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander







Chamorro government or, instead, to construct some sort of social democratic opposition. The former position, not surprisingly, won out. Nicaragua lacks the material basis for social democracy—a large and well-organized working class, or as in Costa Rica, a substantial number of small and medium-sized independent farmers. Ironically, despite two important insurrections (Sandino's and the FSLN's), Nicaragua has almost no tradition of independent worker or peasant organizations.

Maybe 1990 was a moment when such organizations might have been forged. But that did not happen. So, if Ortega is elected, and if he creates some sort of economic planning council along the lines that Wilson describes, why should we expect wealthy ranchers to go along with an agrarian policy that benefits campesinos and collective farmers? I am not convinced that such a council would represent a "thrust toward political participation" by peasants and small farmers, especially if it is created in the context of an alliance with "the business sectors," as Wilson suggests. No, Ortega isn't Alemán, but he will enact policies that are significantly

different from Alemán's only if workers' and peasants' organizations push him to do so.

As for the reference to Alemán's 30-point lead in the polls, my figures came from a mid-July report in *La Tribuna*, a centrist daily in Nicaragua.

## The dynamics of addiction

I agreed with much of Eva Bertram and Kenneth Sharpe's section on drug policy in the alternative democratic platform (September 2). The main objection I have concerns the emphasis they place on drug treatment.

Bertram and Sharpe's discussion of drug-prevention programs stopping casual users from becoming addicts demonstrates they have little idea of the dynamics of addiction. Telling an addict not to use a dirty needle when it's time for another fix is like telling an alcoholic not to drink a warm beer with a cigarette butt in it. When it's time to get high, it's time to get high, and the addicted body will call the shots.

Granted, the present policy of crim-

inal prosecution of people with a complex medical problem doesn't work, but to claim that standard treatment holds the key is specious. Commercial alcohol and drug treatment centers, which use a psychotherapeutic model for treatment, have a success rate of about 20 percent (possibly 10 percent), regardless of what their advertisements say. Others, like Compass House in Ohio, base their treatment on a spiritual model (outlined in *Alcoholics Anonymous*) and ring in with a 60 percent success rate. But anyone in alcohol and drug recovery would say that the path is steep and fraught with danger. One recovering addict informed me that he was told early on that recovery from drugs and alcohol would be the toughest thing he would ever do in his life.

Frank McEvoy  
Alexandria, Va.

**Editor's note:** Please try to keep letters under 250 words in length. Otherwise we may have to make drastic cuts, which may change what you wished to say. Also, if possible, please type and double-space letters—or at least write clearly and with wide margins.

# InSHORT



## COMPANY FOR THE ZAPATISTAS

**O**n August 28, as President Ernesto Zedillo was putting the finishing touches on his annual state of the nation address, a new guerrilla force, the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR), stormed onto the national scene. In the space of two hours on August 28, the organization launched attacks in seven Mexican states, killing 16 people and injuring 28 more.

The rebels first appeared in public at the anniversary ceremony of the June 1995 Aguas Blancas massacre, where 17 unarmed peasants were shot dead by state police in Guerrero state. Zedillo dismissed the appearance as "armed pantomime." Zapatista spokesperson Subcommander Marcos retreated into silence, saying only that the EPR, like the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), would earn credibility over time.

By the end of August, the EPR had demonstrated better than average PR skills—laying the groundwork for that credibility. They gave a lengthy inter-

view to journalists from two Mexican papers in a safe house in Mexico City, and sent out several communiqués explaining their actions and disowning bomb threats made in their name at an Acapulco shopping mall and a hydroelectric dam in Puebla state. "Our fight is against the state and the oligarchy," said one EPR commander in an inter-

view to the newsmagazine *Proceso*. "The people have nothing to fear."

After the August 28 coordinated actions, the government immediately set to work squelching fears that the attacks presaged a mass uprising. "The EPR is a terrorist organization with no support base," said Zedillo. Government officials and intelligence analysts declared in the press that the group was more akin to former European terrorist groups like the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany than to guerrilla movements like the FMLN in El Salvador.

But the attacks clearly rattled the government. With business leaders calling for the "annihilation" of the rebels, Zedillo sent thousands of army troops into Guerrero, Oaxaca, Puebla,

Hidalgo and other states with a suspected EPR presence. The army sealed off 26 villages in the mountains of Puebla, detained and tortured suspects in various states, and warned opposition activists in Guerrero not to leave their homes after 10 at night. The government also began to crack down on legal opposition groups not associated with the EPR.

Undoubtedly, the dynamic intrusion of the new armed group stung the

## Corporate defense fund

UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF FRED KRUPP, THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND (EDF) has long been known for helping itself by helping corporate America. In his book *Losing Ground*, Mark Dowie criticizes the EDF's "PR-driven tendency to turn compromise into false triumph." Such action, he says, "illuminates the desperation and impending moral crisis of the mainstream [environmental] organizations." In a recent fundraising appeal, Krupp sent out a free "Wonders of Wildlife" calendar, accompanied by a list of "10 things you can do now!" These include: "1) Display the enclosed EDF calendar in a prominent place"; "4) Keep tires properly inflated to improve gas mileage and extend tire care"; "6) Organize a Christmas tree recycling program in your community"; and "10) Visit and help support our national parks." With a call to action like that, it's little wonder that the *Wall Street Journal* lauds EDF as "one of the hottest environmental groups around." —Joel Bleifuss

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# APPALL-O-METER

THE IN THESE TIMES INDEX OF INDECENCIES



By David Futrelle

## The Lord's work 4.3

Capitalism marches forward: Five years ago, Dave Honaker, a Colorado entrepreneur, was desperate and close to bankruptcy—until, that is, he hit upon the notion of sucking prairie dogs out of their holes with a gigantic vacuum cleaner. Today, the proud inventor of the Dog-Gone vacuum system makes a good living clearing prairie dogs from his customers' properties. For the most part, he claims, the animals are only dazed in the process, not killed. A modest man, Honaker credits the good Lord with the inspiration for his new career. "The bank stepped in and took everything—my machine shop, marina, everything went down the tubes," he told the Associated Press. "One night my wife said, 'Why don't you ask the Lord to help us?' The next week, I had this dream to catch prairie dogs with a huge vacuum."

## Shave, rattle & roll 7.1

Elvis impersonators—and all those who shave like the King—are no longer welcome in Somalia. According to an Associated Press report datelined Mogadishu, the Islamic court that holds sway over the northern half of the Somali capital has banned, among other things, dirty movies and clean shaves. "Those who shave like Elvis Presley, Sylvester Stallone and the U.S. Marines will not go unpunished," Sheikh Ali Sheikh Mohamud has announced.

## Solicitors 7.7

Several legal associations in Illinois are attempting to set strict limits on lawyerly lechery, reports the *Chicago Tribune*, in hopes of

avoiding the sort of scandals that have shaken the profession in recent years. In 1993, the *Tribune* notes, an elderly Maryland lawyer was suspended for spanking a "bad" client (and a secretary who made typing errors). More recently, an Illinois lawyer was



accused not only of having sex with a client, but of billing her for the privilege. Eight states have already banned such behavior. And in California, the

*Tribune* reports, lawmakers recently considered "a proposal that would have allowed sex only after the lawyer had fully informed the client of the potential perils and advised the client to talk it over with another lawyer and sign a written waiver."

## Appallo-O-Meter

1. Ricki Lake Effect
2. Waterworldly
3. Dole-orous
4. Below the Beltway
5. PRI-posterous
6. Suharto heartless
7. Limbaugh low
8. Ralph Reed-iculous
9. Morris Dicked
10. Unabombastic

tinct from the EZLN.

The EPR has no visible base of support, rejects dialogue with government and believes in armed struggle as a means to seize state power. By contrast, the Zapatistas have an organic structure based in the indigenous communities where decisions are made by community assemblies, and have no interest in seizing power. "We bear arms that aspire to become useless," said Marcos. Nonetheless, the EPR's 45-point plan and the EZLN's demands are similar—principally an end to the one-party state, a transition government, a new constitution and respect for human rights.

An end to civil unrest is not in sight. The government's own Social Security Institute estimates that 158,000 children—or one child every three minutes—die each year of poverty-related illness. Those figures point to the real roots of armed rebellion in Mexico.

—Michael McCaughan

# SLOUCHING TOWARD NOVEMBER

The good news about the upcoming election is that, thanks to the GOP's tepid presidential ticket and an extremely unpopular congressional leader, the "Republican revolution" may go down in history as a one-term affair. The bad news is that the Democrats' favored campaign strategy seems to consist of mimicking Republican stands on issues from immigration to welfare reform. But notwithstanding this rightward drift, progressive candidates shouldn't throw in the towel just yet. The general sense that the Republicans have finally gone too far may give progressive candidates a better chance this year than they've had since 1974, the year of the GOP's last meltdown.

Such is the case in Illinois' 11th Congressional District, which wends its way past the shuttered factories and

Zapatistas, upsetting their long-term dialogue-and-resistance strategy. In an angry communiqué to the EPR, Marcos accused the group of putting the safety of Zapatista commanders at risk by blocking highways in Chiapas. "We are not your enemy," said Marcos. "I just want to tell you that we don't want your help, we don't need it and we're not looking for it."

The EPR is allegedly the armed wing of the Clandestine Revolutionary

Workers Party-People's Union (PROCUP), a fringe revolutionary organization whose principal leaders are in prison. At a clandestine press conference on August 8, the guerrillas announced they had formed the Democratic People's Revolutionary Army (PDPR), an alliance of 14 guerrilla groups, including PROCUP, operating in different Mexican states. While the composition of the movement remains murky, the EPR is dis-

rows of wood-frame houses on Chicago's far southeast side before heading west some 120 miles—halfway across the state—through suburbs and farmland. In 1994, Congressman Jerry Weller rode into office here on the Republican tide that swept the country, pulling in 61 percent of the vote. In a sense, however, the Democrats' real enemy in 1994 was neither Weller nor the so-called revolution—it was voter apathy. More than 72,000 voters who cast Democratic ballots in the 11th District in 1992 stayed home in 1994. Weller won the election by 34,000 votes.

Now the GOP freshman—a loyal if quiet Gingrich follower with a voting record that runs down the far right side of the Republican party line—faces Clem Balanoff Jr., a progressive Chicago Democrat who was born and bred on union organizing and independent politics. "My family was there in the '30s, when 10 people were killed at Republic Steel, organizing the United Steel Workers of America," Balanoff boasts. Bright yellow baseball caps from Steel Workers District 7 litter his desk. On an adjacent wall hangs a picture of his mother, now a circuit court judge, who spent a quar-

ter-century fighting the Democratic machine in Chicago's 10th Ward.

Balanoff has lived up to the family name. Serving in the Illinois House of Representatives from 1989 to 1995,



he vocally opposed NAFTA and fought to increase the minimum wage. Such advocacy has earned him the

support of organized labor—no small factor in the 11th District, which is home to 77,000 union members, more than any other district in the state. Balanoff has rounded up endorsements from the AFL-CIO and most unions in the district, as well as from other powerful groups, including the National Organization for Women, the Sierra Club and the Illinois Council of Senior Citizens.

A poll done for the Balanoff campaign in July indicates that voters aware of Weller's affinity to Gingrich prefer the challenger by a hefty 17-point edge. Not surprisingly, Balanoff has gone to great lengths to link Weller with the House Speaker. Getting that message out costs money, however, and Weller is clearly winning the fundraising war. He's amassed more than \$800,000 since the campaign began. Balanoff lags behind with roughly \$350,000.

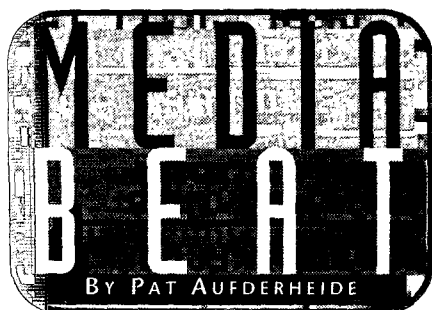
For all his radical pedigree and sound populist instincts may promise, Balanoff hasn't exactly been wearing the progressive label on his sleeve. Playing catch-up with the incumbent in a district that was created to give Republicans an advantage has forced Balanoff to lapse into the wishy-washy campaignspeak favored these days by politicians of all persuasions. He steers clear of substance while emphatically supporting such uncontroversial issues as safe streets, good schools and a comfortable retirement. Balanoff may win—and go on to do great things in Congress—but he hasn't lit any fires on the prairie so far.

—Linda Lutton

## A bridge to the past?

"BOB DOLE HAS BEEN A CORRUPT POLITICAL FIXER FOR ALMOST HIS ENTIRE CAREER. HIS image as a man of decency and character is a myth," write Bob and Sam Parry in a recent issue of *The Consortium*. The father-and-son investigative team reports: "One of Dole's most notorious political dirty tricks came in 1974, when his links to Nixon and Watergate were threatening his re-election. Dole faced a popular Democratic congressman named William Roy, a doctor who had performed 10 abortions during his career. On the Sunday before the election, Catholic churchgoers in Kansas found their car windows plastered with leaflets showing dead fetuses in garbage cans and praising Dole's strong anti-abortion position." Dole was re-elected two days later by a margin of one percentage point. Roy's campaign manager, Bob Brock, traced the fetus leaflets back to the Dole campaign but Dole denied responsibility. Brock subsequently found himself on Nixon's "enemies list" and was audited by the IRS. —J.B.





## How big is too big?

The merger between Time Warner and Turner Broadcasting, approved earlier this month by the Federal Trade Commission, is the latest example of media's hottest trend. In anticipation of the Telecommunications Act of 1996—which dramatically encouraged consolidation—media conglomerates closed merger and acquisition deals worth \$90 billion in 1995, double the total in 1993.

Radio has since seen the quickest consolidation. For example, when CBS/Westinghouse bought Infinity, another huge broadcaster, in June, it gained control of more than a third of the market in Chicago and Dallas/Fort Worth and close to half in Philadelphia and Boston. Now advertisers are worried that large companies may be able to control the prices for advertising time. The Department of Justice has banned greater-than-50 percent control of a local radio market as a precaution—a ban the industry is fighting.

## Channel-surfin' blues

The miracles of modern technology thought to—and may yet—offer TV viewers more choices. But as long as the cable company gets to program your TV's menu, you still have to choose from what the folks there want you to see.

TCI, the nation's single most powerful cable company, tends to want you to see programming it owns a piece of. TCI is now pushing the new 24-hour Fox News Channel on most of its systems, giving the channel an instant national audience. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., which owns Fox, bought this spot with a deal that,

among other things, loans TCI \$200 million to upgrade networks. That way, TCI execs say, they can hope someday to reinstate other popular programming that TCI pushed off the menu to make room for Fox. TCI has also, in some cases, forced non-commercial offerings like the mainline religious Faith & Values channel and C-SPAN 2 to double up on the same channel.

In this buy-in-bulk atmosphere, small entrepreneurs aren't having much luck. Two cable channels that program independent film, Showtime's Sundance Channel and Bravo's Independent Film Channel, currently only reach between 3 and 4 percent of U.S. homes, according to indie filmmaker magazine *The Independent*. The channels need wider audiences to attract advertisers. The problem is not marketing, product quality or financial backing. It's simply getting space on cable systems.

## Prepaid news

When Arts & Entertainment's History Channel announced earlier this year that a new series of corporate profiles would be underwritten by the corporations being showcased, journalistic outcry nipped the project in the bud. But the concept is becoming increasingly popular in today's recombinant media environment. A new TV and radio talk show on business issues, *World Business Review*, features corporate leaders who have paid between \$10,000 and \$50,000 for the pleasure of chatting with co-host (and former defense secretary) Caspar Weinberger. The show is being distributed on a public broadcasting satellite service, Central Educational Network (CEN). NPR and PBS have both rejected it, and CEN—taken to task by the trade magazine *Current*—now says it will include a warning along with the feed to public stations.

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## TOMORROW'S NEWS TONIGHT

By Steve Brodner



*Doctors diagnose Clinton's cyst problem: it's the larvae of corporate contributors who have laid their eggs in Clinton's head.*

# CAR TALK

**B**usiness is booming right now for the Big Three automakers: Together, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler made \$13 billion in 1995, and have \$37 billion in cash reserves. The United Auto Workers (UAW), wanting a share of the good times, approached contract negotiations this month with a few aces up its sleeves as well as some losers in its hand.

On the one hand, just-in-time inventory methods mean that strikes by just a few thousand UAW workers can cripple plants across North America. On the other, however, UAW membership in U.S. parts factories has been tumbling for 30 years. Non-union parts workers typically earn less than half of the \$19-an-hour wage of their unionized counterparts at the Big Three. This gap is a constant source of downward pressure on UAW wage scales in Big Three plants.

The tentative agreement that the UAW announced with Ford Motor Co. on September 16—a settlement that will serve as a model for the entire industry—served as a looking glass into the union's weaknesses and strengths. The UAW had to ask Ford to help pressure its suppliers to be less hostile to union organizers. The UAW also agreed that Ford can create up to 10,000 new union jobs, which would pay several dollars an hour less than traditional UAW wages, in parts operations that would otherwise be non-competitive. UAW officials, however,

will have veto power to ensure this new type of job won't simply siphon investment away from existing UAW factories.

The union agreement with Ford provided higher wages: a \$2,000 bonus in the first year, and a 3 percent base wage increase in both the second and third years. It also commits Ford to maintaining 95 percent of the 105,000 UAW jobs it has now, not only companywide, but in specific local unions.



Wall Street immediately howled that the guaranteed employment levels will cripple GM, which believes it has to cut 40,000 of its 240,000 U.S. blue-collar jobs to match global competitors. GM itself told the union on September 10 that guaranteed employment levels "will not work."

UAW President Stephen Yokich, however, signaled his willingness to compromise. For example, a UAW official said the guaranteed employment level will likely be less restrictive

at GM than at Ford or Chrysler. It won't include at least some of the 12 low-profit Delphi parts-making factories that GM is trying to sell.

While Yokich has tried to remain out of the public spotlight during contract talks, his counterpart at the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW), Buzz Hargrove, has introduced an unabashedly militant tone to this year's contract talks. Meeting with the press daily during the negotiations, Hargrove consistently links his bargaining maneuvers to his political attacks on the Newt Gingrich-style provincial government in Ontario.

Hargrove doesn't pull any punches in his denunciation of Detroit's reliance on outsourcing, the practice of farming out work to outside companies. The CAW is demanding that the automakers create one new job for every job they farm out. "Why wouldn't we outlaw the ability of corporations who are making a lot of money," he asks, "to wreck families, wreck communities and wreck our nation with this [outsourcing] idea?"

Hargrove acknowledges he's proposing "a major intrusion" into decisions that managers traditionally reserve for themselves. Chrysler President Robert Lutz is horrified, saying management's right to decide whether to build parts or buy them from outside companies is "sacrosanct," something unions should never be allowed to tamper with.

As of September 17, the CAW and Chrysler seemed to be edging toward a compromise, but a showdown was looming at General Motors in Canada. Even though GM's Canadian operations are highly profitable, the company insisted on its right to sell off a few low-profit parts factories. Hargrove promised to strike, unless GM reversed plans to dump 5,500 of the 26,000 CAW jobs it now has.

Whatever the details of the remaining contract agreements, Yokich and Hargrove have already mounted the most significant challenge to unfettered "management rights" that the U.S. auto industry has seen in 50 years.

—John Lippert

## Americanizing the Brits

LEADERS FROM BRITAIN'S "NEW LABOR" LABOR PARTY, FACING AN ELECTION sometime in the next eight months, were in Chicago in August picking up pointers from the New Democrats, reports Jonathan Freedland in the *Guardian*. At a New Labor gathering in the Hotel Inter-Continental, deputy Labor leader John Prescott explained to a roomful of British expatriates, "You can't Clintonize British politics, but you can learn from them." The guest of honor at the forum was Democratic Party chair Christopher Dodd. After Prescott presented him with a House of Commons beer tankard, Dodd promised to bring it on his next trip to London so they could go to "that pub." "What did you call it, the Kremlin?" asked Dodd. Prescott grimaced and replied, "Thanks Chris. We're meant to be New Labor now." —J.B.



## SCABS GET GREEN LIGHT

President Bill Clinton has decided not to fight a court ruling overturning an executive order, issued in March 1995, that denied federal government contracts to companies that hire permanent replacement workers during strikes. Labor Secretary Robert Reich defended the no-scab order—arguably the Clinton administration's only pro-labor policy—in a statement issued on September 9, but concluded that “further litigation on the validity of the executive order is not productive.”

Last year, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Manufacturers Association and other business groups filed suit in federal court, charging that the order violated employers' right to continue doing business in the event of a strike. The court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. In February, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the ruling, saying that the president's order constituted an attempt to interfere with employee-procurement policies set by the National Labor Relations Act. The panel also denied the administration's request to put the question before all of the Appeals Court judges instead of just three. As its next step, the administration could have filed an appeal before the Supreme Court, but it decided instead to allow the September deadline to pass without further action.

Clinton initially issued the no-scab order under pressure from labor leaders, who expressed their displeasure with the president for his support of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Even then, the order proved to be of little use to striking workers: While it prevented government contractors from permanently replacing their strikers, it still allowed them to hire temporary replacements for the duration of a strike.

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935 originally protected striking workers from dismissal. But three

years later the Supreme Court ruled that employers could, under certain circumstances, fire striking workers and replace them permanently. In recent years, as companies such as Caterpillar have used the threat of permanent replacement to weaken unions and break strikes, labor leaders have made anti-scab legislation a top priority. In 1993, the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives passed an anti-scab bill, but a similar Senate bill was quashed by a filibuster.

AFL-CIO General Counsel Jonathan Hiatt admits that fighting through the courts to protect strikers is futile. Nonetheless, he believes that a Democratic Congress and president, “educated” by labor, will be a little better disposed toward a striker-replacement bill the next time around. “We certainly hope for a much better Congress,” he says. “But unless the labor movement plays a much more

active role, we're going to have the kind of defeats we've had with NAFTA.”

Others in the labor movement gave up on that hope a long time ago. Leaders of the new Labor Party, who aspire to play the more active role. Hiatt speaks of, scorn the idea that Democrats—especially Clinton, whom the AFL-CIO endorsed in July—can be counted on to enact pro-labor legislation. “[The Clinton decision] is typical,” says Rick Massengill, a Labor Party organizer from Michigan. “It's amazing that anybody expects anything different. That's why we formed the Labor Party.”

—Leah Samuel

### Sources

Michael McCaughan is an Irish journalist based in Mexico.

Linda Lutton is a Chicago-based journalist. John Lippert is the *Detroit Free Press* labor writer.

Leah Samuel is a writer for *Labor Notes* in Detroit.

## THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

By Peter Hannan



# THE FIRST STONE

## WHERE'S ROBIN HOOD?

By Joel Bleifuss

**T**he gap between haves and have-nots is greater now than at any time since 1929," writes Edward N. Wolff in *Top Heavy: The Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America and What Can be Done about It* (New Press, 1996).

Wolff, an economist at New York University, demonstrates that the tax "reforms" enacted by the Reagan and Bush administrations in collusion with Democratic Party leaders during the '80s enabled the wealthiest 1 percent of Americans to enrich themselves at the expense of the bottom 80 percent of the population. Nothing was allowed to trickle down.

Sometimes numbers speak louder than words. In Wolff's book, the numbers shout. In the late '60s, the richest 1 percent of American households owned about 20 percent of the nation's total household wealth. By 1989, the top 1 percent held 39 percent of that wealth, leaving the bottom 80 percent in control of 15 percent.

Even worse, of the total new wealth created in the United States between 1983 and 1989, 62 percent went to the richest 1 percent of households, while 1 percent found its way to the poorest 80 percent. This marks a significant change from the previous 20 years, during which the top 1 percent received 34 percent of the new wealth, while the bottom 80 percent got 18 percent.

This increase in wealth for the rich was in significant part due to a decrease in their taxes. According to the Washington-based group Citizens for Tax Justice, the poorest 90 percent of American families paid a higher proportion of their income in federal tax in 1990 than in 1977. The reverse was true for the richest 10 percent of American families. In fact, the wealthiest 1 percent of households were the main beneficiaries of the supply-side tax cuts of the 1980s. Between 1977 and 1990, this privileged elite enjoyed a 15 percent drop in taxes and saw their after-tax

income jump by 110 percent.

Wolff puts forth a modest proposal to ease the inequality. "The time now is ripe," he writes, "for the introduction of a personal tax on wealth holdings." For a model of such a tax, Wolff looks to Sweden, Germany and Switzerland. Were the United States to implement a wealth tax like Sweden's, federal tax revenues would increase by 74 percent, or \$389 billion. As a result of Sweden's tough tax policies, the richest 1 percent of the population control only 17 percent of the country's total wealth (in the United States, the top 1 percent control 39 percent). A German-style wealth tax would result in a 15 percent increase in total tax revenues, or an additional \$80 billion.

Wolff considers the Swiss system—the most modest of the three—to be the "most appropriate for the United States." A wealth tax like Switzerland's would increase federal

tax revenues by 8 percent, or about \$45 billion. Wolff calculates that under such a tax scheme, only 3 percent of U.S. households would see their overall tax bill rise by more than 10 percent, and 19 percent of households would experience a tax increase of between 1 and 9 percent.

Opinion polls have consistently shown that a majority of the public supports the idea of making the rich pay more in taxes. For example, a 1990 Louis Harris poll found that 82 percent of the population favored raising the tax rate from 28 to 33 percent for people who earned more than \$150,000 a year.

A wealth tax would raise revenues and restrain rising economic inequality. The public is in favor the idea. So why haven't any politicians jumped on board?

At its 1995 convention, the AFL-CIO called on the government to adopt a Swiss-style wealth tax like that proposed by Wolff. But the federation has not made the proposal a priority, says Sheldon Friedman, an AFL-CIO economist. "It's a wonderful idea in principle," he says. "But politically, it seems beyond the pale. Somebody has got to give it a big push—it deserves a big push. Anybody who could move it would have our blessing."

Clinton has made some steps in the right direction. The 1993 budget bill he pushed through Congress raised income tax rates from 31 to 39.6 percent for households with incomes of more than \$250,000. However, that rate is still lower than the tax rates in place at the beginning of the '80s, and much lower than in the '60s.

In Congress, liberal Democrats have been content to tinker with the tax code, trying to close loopholes such as certain corporate welfare tax breaks. They have also rallied opposition to a Republican effort to cut the capital gains tax. But even the House Progressive Caucus sidesteps the issue of raising taxes on the rich. Bill Goold, the House Progressive Caucus staff coordinator, explains that rather than



simply "call for an increase in the tax rates for the rich," the Caucus has proposed reforms that do so in a roundabout way. For example, the Progressive Caucus has sponsored a job-creation bill funded in large part by a .25 percent tax on the transfer of stock ownership.

Nonetheless, says the Economic Policy Institute's Max Sawicky, nobody on Capitol Hill has come up with "serious proposals" to make the U.S. tax system more progressive. "The liberals in this debate have been playing defense," he says.

But sometimes the best defense is a good offense. The right, which has spent the past year enchanting the press with flat-tax proposals, clearly understands this.

The standard-bearers of the party of the rich, Bob Dole and Jack Kemp, have proposed a 15 percent across-the-board tax cut. This gimmick, taken straight from the Reaganomics playbook, would provide an economic windfall for the wealthy and further increase the federal deficit. As Robert McIntyre, director of Citizens for Tax Justice, observed back in 1990: "The federal deficit can be traced, in total, to huge tax breaks granted to the most wealthy Americans. These people have watched their incomes and wealth grow by leaps and bounds. Even as the nation defends them, protects them and makes their way of life possible, it becomes poorer and more indebted by the minute. They are the folks to whom the bill should be sent."

I asked Diana Furchtgott-Roth, flat-taxer and resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, what she thought of a wealth tax. She was perplexed by my question. She explained that a wealth tax is not part of Beltway discourse. "Most policy proposals today," she says, "are moving away from a wealth tax, toward a consumption tax."

The left has allowed the flat-taxers to define the debate. "To increase taxes, particularly on the rich, is not something that has made it to the forefront of the political agenda of either party," says Wolff. "Political propaganda from both sides, not just Republicans, but Democrats as well, has confused the issue."

The press has done its part to keep a wealth tax off the table. When Wolff's study was first released in 1995 by the Twentieth Century Fund, a flurry of mainstream press reports detailed his findings of growing wealth inequality. But none of those reports mentioned that his proposed remedy was a Swiss-style wealth tax. "I did try to do an op-ed piece for the *New York Times*," he recalls. "But they weren't interested in the wealth tax issue. They said it wasn't a 'timely issue,' i.e., it is nothing either political party is interested in discussing at the moment."

Kevin Phillips, speaking at a Citizens for Tax Justice forum in 1990, observed that the congressional Democratic leadership was "so intimately involved in formulating the

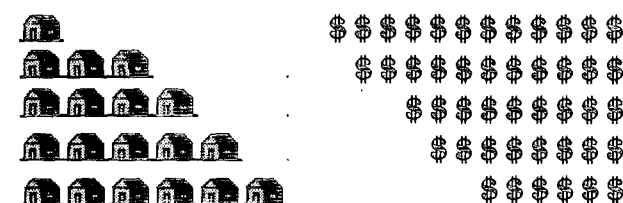
## U.S. Households

## Wealth

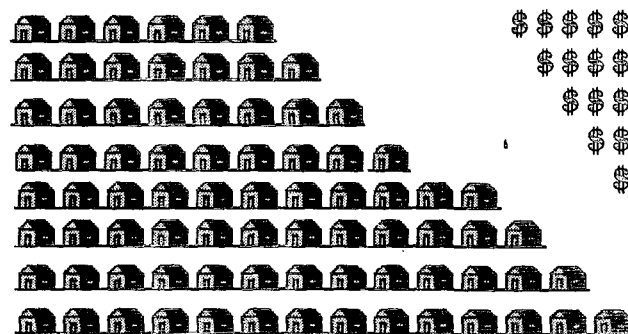
1% of households own 39% of the wealth



19% of households own 46% of the wealth



80% of households own 15% of the wealth



economic policies of the 1980s" that it is unable to criticize the status quo it helped create.

That was six years ago, but Phillips might as well have been talking about the current Democratic leadership. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt's new proposal to simplify the tax system is revenue-neutral and offends nobody. At least nobody who is rich and has given some of the \$2.9 million in campaign contributions that Gephardt raked in between January 1995 and June 1996.

There is a correlation—and I daresay a connection—between the tax cuts of the '80s, the increased cost of running for election and the unwillingness of congressional Democrats to offend those who now finance their re-election campaigns. Adjusting for inflation, the cost of winning a congressional campaign nearly doubled between 1980 and 1992—the same period during which the richest 1 percent of households saw their share of national wealth skyrocket.

As Phillips observed in 1990: "An awful lot of Democrats reacted to the fashionability of business and investment, plus the heavy demands of fundraising, and took the obvious [step of] appealing to people who can support that campaign finance system. That neutralized their ability to move as I think some would probably try to move now if they were free to. They face a very difficult choice between having money to run and having the issues on which to run."

## M I D D L E E A S T

## Useful victims

*Once again,  
the Kurds are  
victims of  
American  
realpolitik in  
the Persian  
Gulf.*

By James Ciment

**I**n the past several weeks, there has been a dramatic realignment of forces in Iraqi Kurdistan. Cornered by the Iranian-backed Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) invited Saddam Hussein and 30,000 of his Republican Guards to help re-establish a balance of power between the two factions in the U.S.-created safe haven in northern Iraq. When the dust settled, the KDP had chased the PUK's leadership to the Iranian border and established hegemony over the safe haven.

The United States once again took it upon itself, despite serious dissent from some of its allies, to teach Hussein the lesson that "aggression will not be tolerated." Yet the recent U.S. attacks on Iraqi air defenses and the extension of the no-fly zone to include Baghdad's largest air base belie the administration's con-

cern. Aimed at Iraq's south and intended, according to administration spokespersons, to shore up the defense of Kuwait, these actions will have little effect on the new balance of forces in the north.

The current U.S. muscle-flexing over the safe haven is further evidence that the United States had an ulterior motive for leaving the "beast of Baghdad" in power in 1991. His presence on a perch above the Persian Gulf offered a strategic justification for a long-term U.S. presence in the region. But it was the formation of the Kurdish safe haven in northern Iraq that provided the humanitarian gloss. In the name of protecting the Kurds against Iraqi repression, the United States has been able to maintain a fleet of more than 24 military aircraft at Turkey's Incirlik Air Base, including F-15s, F-16s and AWACS, all within easy striking distance of Baghdad and Teheran. Hussein is the useful bully; the Kurds the necessary victims. The only problem is that the latter have not played their part very well.

The roughly 30 million Kurds, who inhabit a broad swath of mountainous terrain in the northern Middle East, have been called "history's losers." A fiercely independent and culturally distinctive Muslim people, the Kurds have had the misfortune of occupying the territory of several aggressive and repressive regional powers, including Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Regimes in each of these countries have been determined to build coherent nation-states where none existed before. Viewing the Kurds as an obstacle to that mission, these regimes have dealt ruthlessly with them. After the Iran-Iraq War, to take the most horrifying recent example, Baghdad murdered up to several hundred thousand Iraqi Kurds, some by chemical attack, in retaliation for their support for Teheran.

Still, much of the Kurds' suffering has been self-inflicted. If Kuwait is a feudal emirate where one family holds a virtual monopoly on power, Iraqi Kurdistan, only part of which lies within the safe haven, is little better, though much poorer. It is a house divided against itself. On one side stands the Kurdish Democratic Party led by Massoud Barzani, the current beneficiary of Hussein's intervention, and on the other, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani, which Iran supports. Don't let the high-sounding democratic and nationalist names of these organizations fool you. They are the latest manifestations of centuries-old tribal confederations.

The two leaders' commitment to democracy and even Kurdish nationalism has been, to put it charitably, uneven. Barzani, son of the greatest Kurdish Iraqi chief of the 20th century, Mustafa Barzani, is no democrat. He established an authoritarian regime on his turf in the safe haven. One refugee from KDP-controlled territory, writing under the pseudonym Azad Sulaiman for *Kurdish Life*, a publication



of the Brooklyn-based Kurdish Cultural Institute, compared Barzani's rule to Hussein's. Both, he said, maintain total control of the media and ruthlessly repress critics. Most ordinary Kurds live in fear of losing access to the food and medical aid controlled by Barzani. But as the head of the Kurdish Cultural Institute, Vera Beaudin Saeedpour, argues, "At least Barzani has that sense of noblesse oblige befitting his rank" as a traditional paramount chief. By contrast, Kurds refer to Talabani, a Western-educated lawyer, as "the man with many orifices," for his willingness to accept any offer of help from any party to further his personal and tribal interests.

These two men and their armies of *peshmerga*, or traditional tribal militias (literally, "those who stare death in the face") have been at each other's throats for decades. During the 14-year Kurdish insurgency against Baghdad from 1961 to 1975, the two parties belied their loudly trumpeted commitment to Kurdish nationalism by forming and re-forming a bewildering array of alliances between themselves, and with both Baghdad and Teheran. The eight-year Iran-Iraq war offered similar opportunities for political and military back-scratching and -stabbing.

The Gulf War was too short and too decisive to offer much room for traditional Kurdish maneuvering vis-à-vis Baghdad, so the PUK and KDP went elsewhere in their quest for support. Talabani flew to Washington within days of Hussein's invasion of Kuwait to offer his *peshmerga* to Washington, going so far as to inquire if the Bush administration would like him to assassinate the Iraqi leader on its behalf. Publicly, Talabani made the offer in the name of Kurdish unity and Iraqi democracy. But those close to Talabani say it was just another twist in the PUK's decades-old effort to outflank Barzani. The offer was not so politely declined. State Department officials refused to meet with Talabani and brushed aside the Kurds as an irrelevance. At that point, the Bush administration was too busy rounding up allies in an effort to make its anti-Hussein strategy appear international. Only later would it reassess the usefulness of the Kurds as victims.

Meanwhile, the Barzani confederation was sidling up to Turkey, and vice versa. Ankara has its own Kurdish problem, arguably more threatening than Iraq's. More than 16 million Kurds inhabit Turkey (between 20 and 25 percent of the total population), versus 5 million in Iraq (between 15 and 20 percent of its population). By contrast with the tribalism of Kurdish

parties in Iraq, Turkey's Kurdish rebels, led by the left-wing Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), are united under a distinctly nationalist and anti-tribal banner. Turkish Kurdistan's tribal leadership was decimated in a series of brutal military campaigns between the two world wars. Evidence of the PKK's effectiveness can be measured by Ankara's response: 15,000 guerrillas have kept hundreds of thousands of Turkish troops and billions of military dollars pinned down in Turkey's Kurdish southeast since the mid-'80s.

Former Turkish President Turgut Ozal first publicly aired the idea of a safe haven on the *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* shortly after the end of Desert Storm. Many Ankara observers wondered at the time why the Turks would want to give the neighboring Iraqi Kurds a leg-up on self-determination. Ozal, however, had a plan. There is an old Turkish saying: "Who better to fight a Kurd than a Kurd?" Ankara would offer the Iraqi Kurds support in return for their help in shutting down PKK attacks on Turkey launched from Iraqi Kurdistan.

The United States quickly threw its support behind Turkey's plan, recognizing that it jibed with its own hopes of expanding its military presence in the region. In short, all three parties—the Iraqi Kurd leadership, Turkey and the United States—saw the proposed safe haven as a win-win situation. The losers, it turned out, were the PKK and, more important, the Iraqi Kurdish people themselves, who rose up against Baghdad after the Gulf War, only to be forced to flee as remnants of Hussein's Republican Guards moved into the region.

Observers of the failed post-Gulf War Kurdish uprising and refugee flight to Turkey say these events may not have been as spontaneous as they were portrayed in the international media. While the United States and Turkey

## The Players

**Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP):** The oldest Kurdish party in Iraq, the KDP was founded shortly after World War II as a political front for the Barzani confederation of tribes. Until its recent alliance with Iraq, the KDP was viewed as the more independent and anti-Baghdad of the Iraqi Kurdish parties. Traditionally, the KDP's stronghold has been in the northwest of Iraqi Kurdistan, adjacent to the Syrian and Turkish frontiers.

**Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK):** Founded in the 1960s by Jalal Talabani as a coalition of tribal confederations in opposition to the KDP, the PUK has frequently sided with Baghdad in the past. More recently, the organization has received aid from Teheran. Its stronghold is in eastern Iraqi Kurdistan, next to Iran.

**Kurdish Workers Party (PKK):** A leftist nationalist organization, the PKK was founded in the late 1970s by former university student Abdullah Ocalan. It launched its military campaign against Turkey in 1984. Once steeped in Marxist-Leninist ideology, the PKK has recently modified its demands for an independent, socialist Kurdistan in Turkey's southeast. Today, it calls only for autonomous status.

**Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI):** Once fiercely independent of other Kurdish groups, the party's leadership has been decimated by assassinations in recent years. The current leadership has aligned itself with the PUK. Over the past several years, the safe haven-based KDPI has engaged in a desultory series of raids against Iranian Kurdistan, prompting armed and diplomatic responses from Teheran.

avored a protected Kurdish enclave within Iraq, neither wanted a fully independent Kurdish state. Broadcasting over a CIA-run radio station from Turkey, Bush called for the Kurds to rise up, then did nothing to aid them. Iraqi Kurd leaders themselves also seemed to deliberately pull back. For decades, they had resisted Hussein's military, even when it employed chemical weapons in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War. Surely, they could have stood up to a decimated post-Gulf War Iraqi army that, while the eyes of the world were upon it, wouldn't dare use chemical weapons. Yet Barzani and Talabani's forces fled with hardly a fight. A *New York Times* reporter on the scene suspected foul play when refugee after refugee told him that they were ordered to flee by the Iraqi Kurd *peshmerga*.

The subsequent history of the safe haven has revealed that each party in fact had a different idea of what a winning situation was. Turkey envisioned a temporary alliance with a short-lived Kurdish political entity in northern Iraq. Initially, Barzani and Talabani forces did

cooperate with the Turks in several military campaigns against the PKK. The United States hoped for a more long-term arrangement in northern Iraq than the skittish Turks. In seeking to justify its military buildup in the region, the United States has brushed aside the criticisms of its allies and maintained stiff sanctions against Iraq. Its recent grudging acceptance of a U.N. deal allowing Iraq to trade oil for food and medicine does not mark a change in policy. It was no secret that Hussein found the deal's many restrictions an affront to Iraqi sovereignty. Hussein's decision to support Barzani in the safe haven may have been his way of sending a loud Bronx cheer to the United States, indicating that he had changed his mind about accepting the deal.

For the Iraqi Kurd leaders, the safe haven was supposed to be a stepping-stone to their age-old dream of an independent state—or at least a free hand to rule the roost in their area. While Barzani and Talabani suspected that Ankara didn't care who ruled the safe haven so long as they helped fight the PKK, they knew that the West liked democracies.

So they established one—or, as one Kurdish refugee put it, they “forged” one. The result was a near farce. Virtually no international observers were present during the 1992 Kurdish elections, which resulted in an abruptly canceled runoff for president and a power-sharing arrangement transparently worked out between Barzani and Talabani.

Unfortunately for Ankara and Washington, the Kurds failed to keep up their end of the bargain. By 1994, the KDP and the PUK were once again engaged in a bitter power struggle in Kurdish Iraq, leaving the Turkish Kurd militants of the PKK to go about their business of conducting a guerrilla war from Iraqi territory. This was an embarrassment for Washington, but an outright catastrophe for Turkish military strategists. The Iraqi Kurdish infighting helps explain Ankara's 35,000-man invasion of the safe haven in March 1995, the largest extraterritorial military effort in the republic's 75-year history. Now Turkey has taken advantage of the recent turmoil to establish a free-fire zone on Iraq's side of their border. As with earlier Turkish incursions, the United States sided with Ankara. The hypocrisy of the U.S. position is breathtaking: On the one hand, it is not OK for Hussein to re-establish authority over his own territory, even when invited to do so by the Kurds, but on the other hand, it is acceptable for Turkey

## Kurdish rebellions since World War II

	Allies	Results
<b>IRAQ</b>		
1961-75	Shah of Iran, U.S.	Abandoned by allies after the Shah signed an accord with Baghdad.
1980-88	Islamist Iran	Decimated by Saddam Hussein's forces at the end of the Iran-Iraq War.
1991	U.S., Turkey	Resulted in the establishment of the safe haven.
1994-96	Iraq (for KDP), Iran (for PUK)	Civil war ended in rout of PUK forces by KDP/Iraq coalition.
<b>IRAN</b>		
1946	Soviet Union	Soviet support collapsed under early Cold War pressure by U.S. and Britain.
1979	Iraq	Post-revolution uprising crushed by Khomeini forces.
1980-88	Iraq, U.S.	Gradually defeated by resurgent Iranian forces toward the end of the Iran-Iraq War.
<b>TURKEY</b>		
1984-	Syria (Turkey alleges PKK also supported by former Soviet Union, Greece and Iran.)	Ongoing





the attention of the international community, few in the West were willing to listen. Thus, Baghdad may have felt it had to back Barzani as a counterforce to what it perceived as an unholy PUK-Iranian alliance.

And round and round it goes. While U.S. policy toward Iraq is unlikely to change, there is growing evidence that Washington's relations with the Iraqi Kurds might. Clinton administration officials hint that the United States may be attempting to distance itself from the KDP and PUK. The former's recent alliance with Hussein, following two long years of civil war between the two factions in the safe haven and several unsuccessful U.S.-brokered attempts at peacemaking, has made it increasingly difficult to portray the Kurds as victims. The fact that the United States chose to go after targets in southern Iraq rather than in the north, where Hussein's supposed aggression occurred, supports this conclusion.

to violate Iraqi sovereignty.

And what were the KDP and PUK leaders so busy fighting over that they forgot about the PKK? The usual: contraband. With its territory abutting Turkey, Barzani's KDP was making a small fortune smuggling food into Iraq and fuel oil out in direct violation of the U.S.-backed international sanctions against Baghdad. Talabani, situated on the less lucrative Iranian border, was both envious and fearful. Lacking funds to pay his *pesh-merga*, he turned this time to Teheran in a quid pro quo deal not unlike that reached earlier with Turkey. In exchange for halting the operations in the safe haven of Iranian Kurds in revolt against Iran, Talabani was rewarded with Iranian arms.

This weaponry emboldened Talabani to push into and occupy Barzani territory, including the supposedly neutral safe haven "capital" of Erbil with its lucrative smuggling operations. Baghdad has long known that Teheran was covertly aiding Talabani. When it tried to bring this to

If the United States chooses to abandon the Kurds in the near future, it will not be the first time. After cutting off military aid to the Kurds in 1975, thus betraying them in their struggle against the then pro-Soviet, anti-Shah Baghdad government, Henry Kissinger was heard to remark: "Covert action is not missionary work." Indeed.

James Clement is the author of *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran* (Facts on File Publishing, 1996).

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## C A M P A I G N ' 9 6

# Nightmare on Helms Street

*Can an older, wiser Harvey Gantt drive a stake through the heart of Jesse Helms' Senate career?*

By Gary Barlow  
RALEIGH, N.C.

**I**'m six years older, six years wiser, six years grayer and six years tougher," declares North Carolina senatorial candidate Harvey Gantt, wryly alluding to his narrow, heartbreaking loss to Sen. Jesse Helms in 1990. In that race, progressives across the country held their breath as Gantt came dangerously close to unseating the man who is arguably the country's most despised politician. But after trailing the challenger by four to eight points until the final week of the campaign, Helms won by a scant four percentage points.

Helms' come-from-behind victory in that race owed much to vicious, last-minute attack ads created by Dick Morris, the now-disgraced political consultant who was recently forced out of the Clinton campaign when his indiscretions with a prostitute became public. The televised ads depicted white male hands holding a job-

rejection slip as a voice-over announced: "You needed the job, and you were the best qualified. But they had to give it to a minority because of a racial quota. Is that really fair?" This time, Gantt vows that he will be ready for anything Helms throws at him in the final days of the campaign. He has staked his chances on a tougher, more populist image and a heavily media-driven campaign, a strategy many observers consider risky.

But all his life, Gantt has beaten the odds. Born poor in South Carolina, he helped his father build their family's home. As a young man, he was the first African-American to attend Clemson University, graduating with honors. After obtaining a master's degree from MIT, he built a prosperous architectural firm, Gantt Huberman, in Charlotte. In 1975, he entered Charlotte politics as a member of the city council. Eight years later, he confounded political experts by winning Charlotte's mayoral election, even though the city was only 22 percent African-American at the time.

Before facing Helms this November, Gantt had to fight hard to win the Democratic Party nomination. In the May 7 primary, Gantt faced wealthy Glaxo Wellcome Pharmaceuticals executive Charlie Sanders, who had the support of many in the Democratic Party establishment. Striking a theme many perceived as racist, Sanders ran as the "electable" alternative to Gantt, implying that Gantt couldn't beat Helms because the state's voters wouldn't elect an African-American to the Senate. But despite being outspent mightily by Sanders, Gantt surprised the political experts again, trouncing his opponent by a 10-point margin. Gantt supporters point to that victory as proof that Gantt's appeal transcends racial divisions.

They also argue that their candidate is better defined than he was six years ago. Many observers ascribe some of the blame for Gantt's defeat in 1990 to his "fuzzy" campaign—he essentially ran as "not Jesse Helms." This year, Gantt has returned as an issues-oriented populist, focusing on the economic fears of middle-class working families. He has positioned himself resolutely as the candidate of the people, railing against the tax breaks that make it profitable for drug companies—major employers in North Carolina—to export jobs overseas. He has called for stronger severance packages for laid-off employees (and for making severance pay tax-free), expanded job-training programs and incentives for companies to encourage employee stock ownership.

As for health care policy, Gantt has called for protecting, not cutting, the Medicare budget. He argues that the federal government should aim to guarantee health insurance for every American. Until that goal is achieved, Gantt proposes measures to make health care more affordable, such as making health insurance completely tax-deductible. He advocates requiring drug companies to give local pharmacies the



same pricing discounts they give to large HMOs and hospitals. He would reduce the length of some drug patents and rescind tax breaks to pharmaceutical companies that increase prices beyond the rate of inflation.

Gantt also advocates increased funding for education. The issue resonates in the state, which takes pride in its educational system (three North Carolina universities ranked among the nation's top 25 colleges and universities in recent *U.S. News & World Report* rankings). Gantt supports full funding for programs such as Head Start, \$10,000 annual tax deductions for college and vocational school tuition, increased funding for Pell Grants, and expanded funding for college work study programs.

Gantt's hard focus on bread-and-butter issues is one of two major departures from his 1990 campaign. In a gamble that has surprised many political experts, Gantt is pinning his hopes for election on a media-driven campaign strategy. With the Helms/Morris attack blitz etched in his mind, he is spending every cent he can buying up television time. Gantt has virtually no field operation of his own, a move most political experts consider risky, even suicidal. Campaigns typically rely on field operations to identify and make individual contacts with swing voters. Many elections are won and lost on the strength of candidates' fieldwork. But mounting an effective statewide field campaign is expensive, particularly in a state like North Carolina, where voters are spread out in a number of medium to large cities.

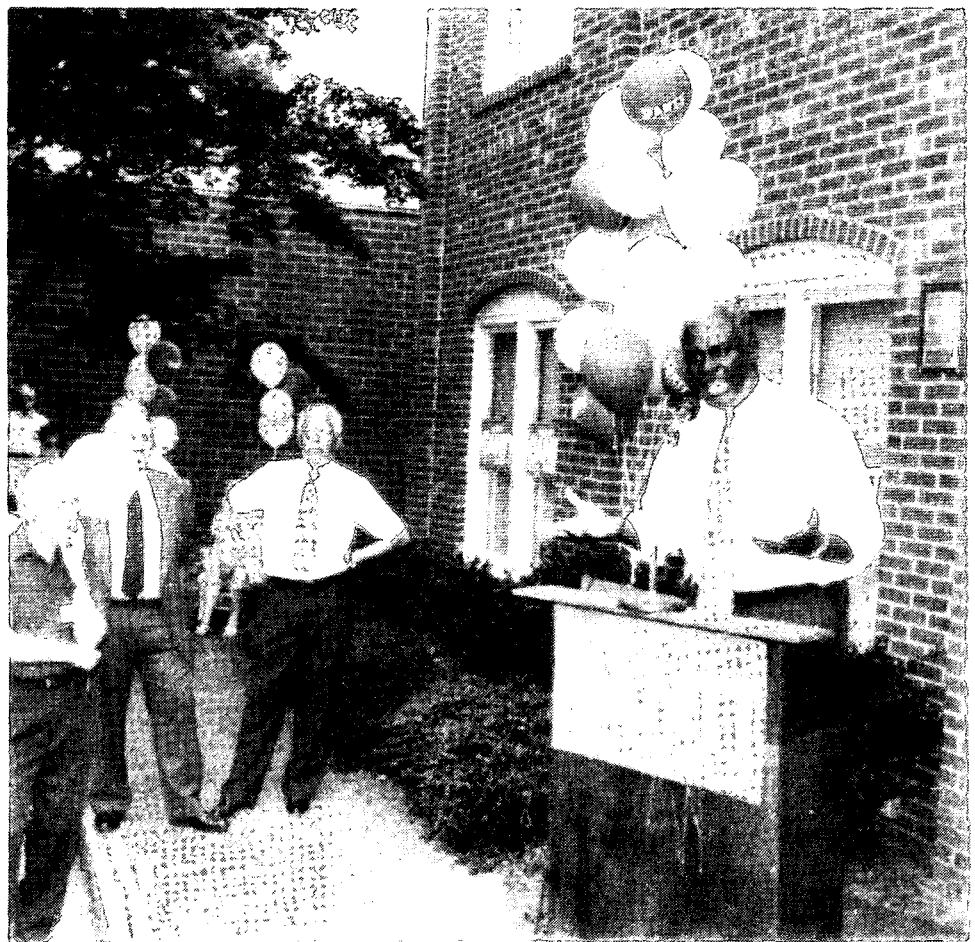
Several factors unique to the Gantt-Helms race make the media strategy seem a worthwhile gamble. Most races start with a fairly large bloc of undecided voters. Candidates begin by calculating their base of support, and then target enough undecided voters to reach a probable majority. Campaigns involving Jesse Helms, however, do not start out with a significant number of fence-sitters. His past re-election campaigns, as well as polls throughout the years, show that Helms can count on a solid base of support, comprising about 45 percent of North Carolina voters; an equally large percentage can be counted on to vote for anyone who runs against Helms. Thus, the swing voters make up only about 10 percent of the electorate. Putting together a field operation to reach them would be costly, and Helms has an overwhelming financial advantage in this race. He can afford both massive TV advertising and

a field operation; Gantt cannot.

Gantt's advisers have decided to let the Democratic Party, which has a strong statewide field operation already in place, do their fieldwork for them—a calculated risk that could pay off but is not without complications. To begin with, most of the state's Democratic leaders did not support Gantt in the primary, and residual tensions remain between the Gantt campaign and party leaders. The Gantt campaign is also competing for the party's attention. The party is working for Gantt, but its leaders consider the governor's race, in which popular incumbent Democrat Jim Hunt is running for re-election, and the presidential race more important. Much to its surprise, the Clinton/Gore campaign is finding that it might be able to carry North Carolina. The party is also working to wrest several hotly contested congressional seats from the Republicans.

Gantt strategists are convinced that regardless of what races the state Democrats focus on, Gantt can't lose. Given the plethora of tight contests, the party is working at fever pitch to turn out Democratic voters. It stands to reason that most of those voters will support Gantt as well as Clinton, Hunt and others. Conversely, the party would do well to devote as much energy

Senate candidate Harvey Gantt stumping in North Carolina.



## GANTT'S GRASS-ROOTS GO-GETTERS

**W**orking in a crowded office in Durham, Mandy Carter is on a mission. As the founder and lead organizer of North Carolina Mobilization '96, she is out every day, recruiting as many volunteers as she can to work on Harvey Gantt's behalf. Having worked tirelessly for almost 30 years as an organizer for peace and justice, and as an advocate for equality for African-Americans, women, and lesbians and gays, Carter says she's going to take a well-deserved sabbatical. "This is it. After this, I'm taking off. I'm so tired," she says. "But we've got to elect Harvey Gantt before I can do that."

For now, though, Carter is relentless. Crisscrossing the state ("Driving relaxes me," she says. "It's where I do my thinking"), she is doing Gantt's fieldwork for him, calling out hundreds of volunteers from her extensive database of contacts. "I'm not holding anything back," she says. "This is the big one. I'm calling in all my favors to defeat Jesse Helms and elect Harvey Gantt. This is the most important race of my life. I know we're gonna win."

She runs N.C. Mobilization '96 on a shoestring, but she knows that she and groups like hers are Gantt's secret weapons. "Helms has never won by a large margin," Carter says emphatically. "What people remember is that he wins. They don't remember that he barely wins. If we can turn out the numbers, we win. And we will win." —G.B.

and resources as possible to Gantt; the Democrats need the heavy African-American turnout that he can deliver.

In addition to the party's field efforts, Gantt can also count on the efforts of environmentalists, gays and lesbians, women's groups and numerous others whom Helms has provoked over the years. In fact, several groups have formed for the sole purpose of defeating the incumbent, ranging

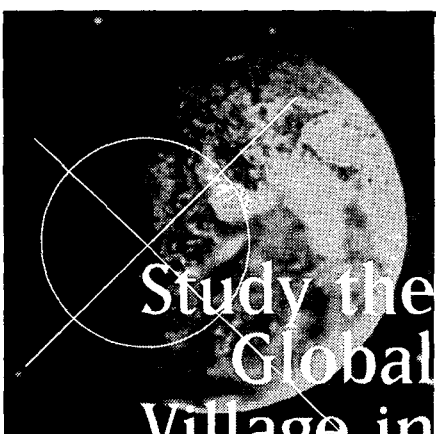
from Mothers Against Jesse in Congress to North Carolina Mobilization '96 (see sidebar). Gantt also benefits from strong support among African-American groups and churches throughout the state.

The Gantt campaign, though, is somewhat wary of being too closely associated with many of these groups, particularly gay/lesbian/bisexual groups and out-of-state groups perceived to be too liberal, since they are favorite Helms targets. In reality, of course, it is Helms who is racking up huge out-of-state contributions, especially from PACs.

According to campaign finance reports tracked by the Center for Responsive Politics in Washington, D.C., Helms has raised more than \$635,000 to date from PACs representing the usual suspects—such as the tobacco and agricultural industries, as well as insurance, textile and banking companies. He's also received large amounts from less obvious allies, such as Coca-Cola and J.C. Penney.

This year, however, Helms may not be able to count on one of his stalwarts—the Christian Coalition. In 1991, Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed was videotaped bragging about how the group had distributed 750,000 pro-Helms voter guides in the last days of the campaign in response to a plea for help from Helms to Pat Robertson. For that and other alleged violations, the Federal Election Commission, prodded by People For the American Way (PFAW), has filed suit against the group and the IRS is scrutinizing its non-profit tax status. PFAW asserts that it "will be watching the North Carolina Senate race like a hawk" for similar violations.

Most observers agree that the race is too close to call. So far, both candidates have been airing only "soft" ads, but as November 5 approaches, that will certainly change. "I know that Jesse Helms will come after me with one of his trademark negative campaigns. And this time, I will not let him get away with it," Gantt recently remarked, adding, "I will retire Jesse Helms in 1996." Based on his record, it wouldn't be wise to doubt Harvey Gantt's ability to do just that.



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# **B L A C K A M E R I C A**

## **Crack in the mirror**

*How the CIA  
and allies of  
the "Just Say  
No" crowd  
helped spread  
America's  
worst drug  
epidemic.*

By **Salim Muwakkil**

**I**n a 1989 interview with *In These Times*, African-American community organizer Sonny Carson called crack cocaine "chemical warfare" against black Americans. (See "The fast food of drugs," February 7, 1989.) As president of the New York-based group Black Men's Movement Against Crack, Carson provoked controversy with his calls for vigilante attacks on crack dealers. "It's ... part of a genocidal war, and we must be warlike in fighting it," he said. But Carson knew that the problem ran deeper than the powerful gangs and small-time pushers who prey on black communities. "Who do you think arranged for all of this crack to get into the black community?" he asked rhetorically. "The government, the CIA, Oliver North and the rest of them."

Black nationalists like Carson have long situated the crack plague within a

larger government-inspired conspiracy against African-Americans. Crack, they claim, is merely the latest, most violent chapter in an old story, one that includes the introduction of heroin into black communities during the early '60s and other drug epidemics over the years. Mainstream commentators invariably denigrate such charges as paranoid conspiracy-mongering. Even white progressives tend to dismiss them as implausible. But according to a bombshell three-part series in the *San Jose Mercury News*, disbelievers may owe the Sonny Carsons of the world an apology. After a year-long investigation, the newspaper has uncovered compelling evidence that the crack cocaine epidemic was created under the tutelage of the U.S. government.

In the series, *Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb tracks crack cocaine from its murky origins in the Bay Area in 1974 to its devastating march through inner-city America. He describes how two members of the CIA-created contras sold tons of cocaine to the Crips and Bloods street gangs of South-Central Los

Angeles and used the profits to finance their terrorist campaign against Nicaragua's Sandinista government. Webb names names, linking narco-trafficking contra operatives Juan Norwin Meneses and Oscar Danilo Blandon to a notorious L.A. drug dealer named "Freeway Rick" Ross.

According to Webb's account, Blandon helped create the inner-city crack market as a strategy to boost sagging demand for cocaine. As the price of powder cocaine took off in the late '70s, the market among middle-class users began to dry up. To find customers, Webb writes, Blandon and his Nicaraguan cohorts "headed for the vast, untapped markets of L.A.'s black ghettos." They arrived in South Central just as street-level drug users were learning about crack. Because of the enormous quantities of cocaine available to them, the Nicaraguans jumped into crack with both feet and were able to undercut competitors and corner the market. "Most cocaine dealers were unwilling to risk their valuable crystals in a process that was largely unproven," Webb says. "But with Meneses' connections to huge amounts of coke, it was easier to take the risk." After their stunning success in Los Angeles, Blandon and Ross expanded their marketing scheme to other cities. The rest is history.

While the contras are barely a memory today, Webb writes, "black America is still dealing with [crack's] poisonous side effects. Urban neighborhoods are grappling with legions of homeless addicts. Thousands of young black men are serving long prison sentences for selling cocaine—a drug that was virtually unobtainable in black neighborhoods before members of the CIA's army brought it into South Central in the 1980s at bargain-basement prices."

Webb found documents showing that the CIA was aware of, and may have provided support for, the drug-

running operation. Several government agencies complained at the time that the CIA, citing unspecified "national security" interests, thwarted investigations of Meneses, a well-known drug smuggler.

Although Webb's series is rigorously researched and documented, his conclusion—that the U.S. government is directly implicated in the crack epidemic—has received surprisingly little publicity. That may soon change. Responding to demands from California Rep. Maxine Waters and Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, CIA Director John Deutch last month ordered his inspector general to investigate the charges. "Although I believe there is no substance to the allegations in the *Mercury News*, I do wish to dispel any lingering public doubt on the subject," Deutch said.

The Congressional Black Caucus and several other black organizations recently urged the Clinton administration to conduct an immediate investigation of the charges made in the *Mercury News* series. Waters, who represents South-Central Los Angeles in Congress, has also called for a Justice Department investigation.

"If most Americans knew that our government, through the CIA, was involved in subsidizing drugs for these cities, it would create a great sense of revulsion," said the Rev. Jesse Jackson in a recent speech. "And I mean most Americans—black, white and brown, Democratic and Republican—would reject such a notion if they knew it." During a recent appearance with Jackson at Rainbow/Operation PUSH's Chicago headquarters, U.S. drug czar Gen. Barry McCaffrey endorsed the Black Caucus' call for a formal investigation of the charges.

Black leaders are particularly outraged because of the devastating effect crack cocaine has had on many African-American communities. Its cheap high was matched by an equally irresistible economic appeal. Jobless black youth found easy employment as crack couriers and small-time dealers. In his new book, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*, Harvard sociologist William Julius Wilson connects the rise in murder rates and lawlessness to the introduction of crack cocaine. The sudden availability of a cheap, highly addictive product provoked violent scrambles for drug turf.

Because of its addictive qualities and enormous profit potential, crack led to even higher crime rates than heroin. In Brooklyn, N.Y., for example, police estimated that crack was a factor in half of all felony drug arrests by 1989, only four years after it first appeared in New York. Police officials in Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Houston, Dallas, New Orleans and Miami blamed the crack cocaine trade for increases in their cities' murder rates in the late '80s. Although use of the drug has been leveling off, crack remains a deadly presence in many of America's inner cities. The demand is still high, the supply large and the profits alluring.

The crack epidemic was rendered even more destructive by an ever-expanding war on drugs that did little to curb the

spread of crack even while imprisoning record numbers of black men. As the media churned out tales of crack's addictive powers and detailed the crack-related deaths of high-profile black athletes like Len Bias and Don Rogers, legislators stampeded to enact tough new crack laws. Penalties for people convicted of possessing or trafficking in crack—90 percent of whom are black—were dramatically increased relative to other drugs. In some cases, sentences for possession of crack were as much as 10 times as long as sentences for identical quantities of powder cocaine. According to the Sentencing Project, these new laws account for the entire rise in black incarceration rates over the last decade.

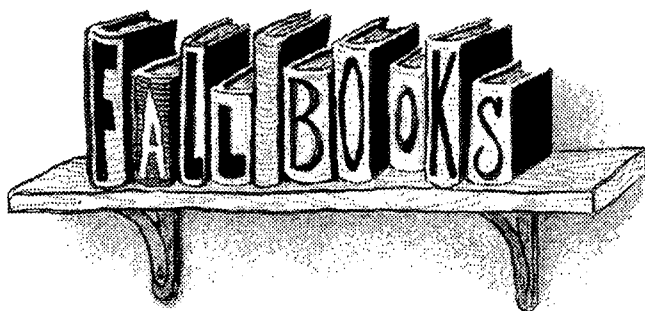
So far, President Clinton has been unwilling to address the sentencing inequities that send ever-growing numbers of blacks to jail for drug violations—or to make a campaign issue of the crack epidemic's real origins. Webb doubts Clinton will ever try to pin the Nicaraguan connection on the Republicans. "The Democrats' hands are just as dirty in this thing," he says. "Some of this drug-CIA intrigue extends into the Carter administration, as well." In fact, Webb says, much of the information has been a matter of public record for more than a decade.

In 1986, Sen. John Kerry (D-MA) convened the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Narcotics and International Operations to investigate charges of illegal gun-running and drug trafficking by the contras. Two years later the committee issued its findings: "It is clear that individuals who provided support for the contras were involved in drug trafficking, the supply network of the contras was used by drug trafficking organizations, and elements of the contras themselves knowingly received financial and material assistance from drug traffickers. In each case, one or another agency of the U.S. government had information regarding the involvement either while it was occurring, or immediately thereafter."

Despite these shocking conclusions, few mainstream publications followed up on the hearings with sustained investigations. "In some ways," Webb says, "it made me ashamed to be called a journalist, in view of the wealth of incriminating information about the government that was never explored."

With so much blame to go around, perhaps it's not surprising that the standard-bearers of journalism are looking the other way as leaders of the two major parties sweep this issue under the carpet. Meanwhile, campaign rhetoric surrounding the drug issue reaches new depths of denial and absurdity. Dole blames Clinton for a lack of ruthlessness in the drug war; Clinton blames the Republicans for refusing to adequately fund his war. This vacuous blame game would be laughable were it not for that war's terrible effect on black America. "The consequences of this wholesale dumping of cocaine into inner cities by CIA-organized agents has been widespread homelessness, violence, the destruction of families and death," Waters says. "This is a story of enormous proportions. If it's true, just think of the governmental responsibility to right the terrible wrongs it has committed."





## Mercenaries in the culture wars

By Gregory Jay

Is it the best of times or the worst of times for higher education today? As their titles suggest, Lawrence Levine's *The Opening of the American Mind* and Christopher Lucas' *Crisis in the Academy* paint radically different pictures of the current tumult in the Ivory Tower. According to Levine, changes in the academy have been all to the good. More students from more diverse backgrounds are studying a wider range of ideas, events and texts than ever before. His lucid survey of campus culture wars from the Colonial period to the present demonstrates that there has never been a consensus about the curriculum or the canon, and that the quality of humanities education in the '90s far surpasses anything offered previously. According to Lucas, undergraduate education has withered as faculty have become obsessed with tenure, publication, research grants, outside consulting and everything else but the liberal arts classroom. Lucas brushes aside the achievements Levine celebrates, and seems not to appreciate how closed higher education has been in the past and how hard a struggle it has been to open up the campus culture.

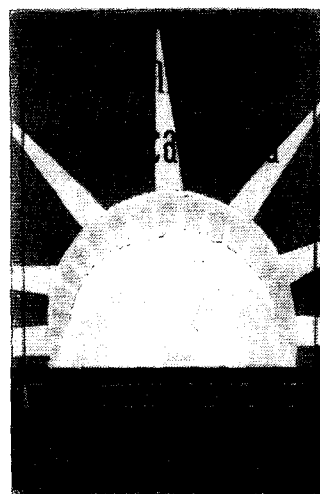
Though the differences between these two pictures can in part be accounted for by ideology, they also emanate from a difference in focus. While Levine is mostly concerned with what students are learning and why, Lucas concentrates on how higher education is organized and administered. Much of *Crisis in the Academy* is given over to an informative survey of the demographics and growth, educational philosophy, admissions, and curriculum of colleges and universities. So it is not a paradox to observe that both books are often right, since so often they do not overlap. The great exception is the question of teaching. Here, Lucas presents a more cautious and reasonable version of the denunciations already familiar from Charles Sykes and others: Today's faculty are research-obsessed specialists who rarely put time

or interest into the undergraduate classroom. Lucas offers a large amount of recycled information on this topic, and no one will deny its partial truth.

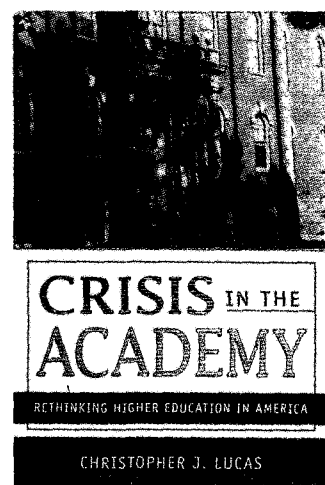
However, Levine is surely right in documenting the exciting intellectual ferment in the undergraduate classroom today. "It is the openness of the contemporary university," says Levine, "that is so threatening and the complexity of the education available to students today that is so disturbing to the university's most vigorous detractors."

No one denies that faculty are renovating the undergraduate curriculum at a dizzying rate. In literature, scores of excellent works and authors have been rediscovered and added to the syllabus. Whole literary movements and periods have been recovered or redefined. In history, the coverage now extends beyond the "great men, wars and dates" syllabus of yesteryear to encompass the full range of human cultural activity. The inaccurate and biased accounts prevalent just a decade or two ago are giving way to better researched, more critical histories. And similar revisions are happening in art history, music, philosophy, anthropology and film. Traditional departmental structures are being challenged (though not as strongly as they might be) by cross-disciplinary programs in women's studies, ethnic studies, gay and lesbian studies, and other such initiatives.

In fact, it was precisely these innovative approaches to teaching that prompted the assault on academe known as the "political correctness" debate. The cultural right attacked the "tenured radicals" not because the faculty were spending too little time on their teaching. On the contrary, the polemics from the right assumed that today's faculty were all too involved in communicating their theoretical and



**The Opening of the American Mind: Canons, Culture, and History**  
By Lawrence W. Levine  
Beacon Press  
224 pp., \$20



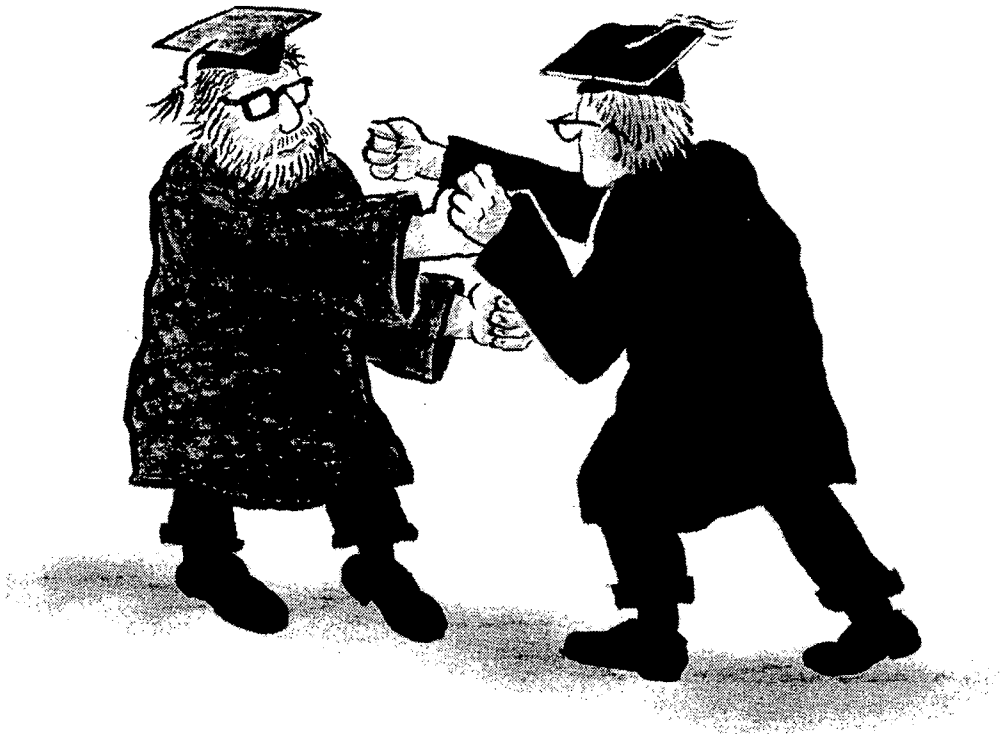
**Crisis in the Academy: Rethinking Higher Education in America**  
By Christopher J. Lucas  
St. Martin's Press  
298 pp., \$29.95

practical research to undergraduate minds. There was always a contradiction between the claim that professors did not care about teaching, and the claim that they were zealously indoctrinating their students. Many of the same neoconservative critics cited by Lucas were trapped by this paradox, but he seems oblivious to their dilemma.

The issue is not, then, the quantity of faculty involvement in undergraduate education, but the kind of involvement. Here Dinesh D'Souza and his ilk forthrightly disagree with the new educational initiatives on campus. Lucas is more disingenuous. He claims to object to innovations in teaching only because they encourage "specialization" and detract from the teaching of a core curriculum. Yet many of the programs he dislikes are providing college and university students with just the kind of rigor and coherence in their courses of study that the general education requirements abandoned. Moreover, these new programs are rightly putting pressure on the remaining core curriculum to rethink its principles and materials. A "Western Civilization" curriculum that imagines that coverage of race and gender belongs properly only to African studies or women's studies departments is obviously defective, even on its own terms.

But Levine goes too far in arguing that "there is no conflict between multiculturalism and the study of Western European culture." There is a conflict, since notions of "Western" and of "culture" were often constructed through false and sometimes vicious representations of "others" deemed not worthy of study or citizenship. Some of the material added by the new scholarship in history and literature will not fit with the old models, theories and stories. In constructing a syllabus for a 15-week course, a teacher will have to decide which authors and events to cover and which to omit. There are winners and losers in the culture wars, and arguments have to be made to justify our decisions.

Readers tired of the media blitz against higher education will doubtless welcome *The Opening of the American Mind* as a refreshing rebuttal to Allan Bloom and his heirs—indeed, Beacon Press is aggressively touting Levine as a left version of D'Souza. Though less helpful than Gerald Graff's *Beyond the Culture Wars* when it comes to practical suggestions about classroom responses to the conflicts, Levine's book is that brief, witty, persuasive volume you can give to



skeptical friends and family who are wondering whether the professors have lost their minds. In its sweet reasonableness, however, Levine's book is unlikely to satisfy those looking for someone to slash and burn the opposition. That opposition is also unlikely to be much provoked by Levine's chapters, which often defend academics today by arguing that these debates are as old as the hills, and thus not worth all the fuss. While marshaling a good deal of primary historical evidence of past controversies over canons and curriculums, Levine undercuts his own case on behalf of the present reforms by falsely implying that they are basically not a radical departure from the past.

Since Levine and Lucas are both historians, it is not surprising that both should urge us to acquire some historical perspective on today's debates. Yet to the degree that both flatten out the differences between past and present, they make it more difficult to explain exactly why the campus culture wars made it to the front page and continue to preoccupy us. While the current crop of critics denouncing multiculturalism, immigration, educational reform and feminism may often sound like their predecessors, at least one difference is worth noting. The media blitz against "political correctness" arose as a carefully orchestrated attack funded in great measure by conservative think tanks and foundations with close ties to the Republican Party. This political



network largely bankrolled many of the chief ideologues of the cultural right—including Bloom, D'Souza, Lynne Cheney, William Bennett, Hilton Kramer, Christina Hoff Sommers and Gertrude Himmelfarb. It also funds organizations such as the National Association of Scholars and magazines such as the *New Criterion*, as well as dozens of campus newspapers around the country.

This funding does not merely make the conservative outcry about the "politicization" of education grossly hypocritical. It means that simply countering the arguments of such people, or showing how inaccurate or old hat they may be, is unlikely to have much effect. For academics, debating the right's foundation intellectuals is bound to be an exercise in frustration, since they do not abide by the standards of research and scholarly integrity demanded on campus. Since the goal of a D'Souza or a Cheney is power and influence, not a better understanding of the world, their factual errors and misrepresentations are regularly recirculated no matter how often they are disproved.

The danger of the cultural right, then, lies not so much in their ideas as in the establishment of a well-funded industry for producing, disseminating and legitimating them. Once the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute displace Yale or Michigan State or Spelman College in the reporter's rolodex, something more than a victory of one idea over another has taken place. The careful and often tedious scholarly process for producing and evaluating ideas has been junked. In its place is a reckless publicity machine that subordinates truth and facts to the political interests of a power elite. The media, for their part, have been suckered, running the faxes, op-ed pieces and essays of the cultural right with almost no investigation of the financial and political machinery that spits them out.

If there is a "crisis," it is less "in" the academy than in the relationship between the academy and other networks of intellectual power in our society. The delegitimation of higher education, like the delegitimation of public education as a whole, belongs to a larger effort to privatize American life and so shift the power over culture to those who can pay for it. Thus everyone gets diverted arguing about political correctness or tenured radicals, while ignoring the real news: the transfer of intellectual power from the public sphere to an alternative intellectual universe of privately funded special-interest organizations.

The target of the cultural right's attack on the academy is not so much ideas as it is the institutional power to decide which truths and facts get legitimated. With this context in mind, Lucas' proposals to abolish tenure, downgrade research and restructure academic departments suddenly appear less an effort at reform than a Trojan horse in the war against the independence of academic intellectuals. ◀

*Gregory Jay* is a professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and author of *American Literature and the Culture Wars*, forthcoming from Cornell University Press.

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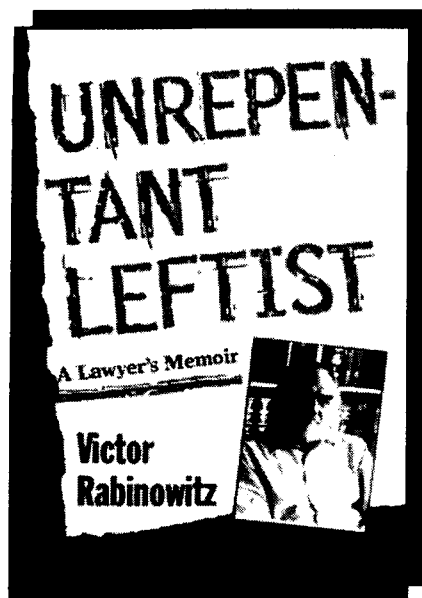
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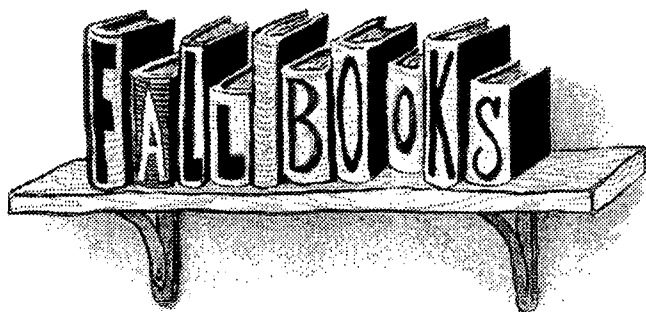
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## Lesbian chic

By Heather Zwicker

In the spring of 1994, near the end of my first year as an assistant professor at the University of Alberta, I was invited to bring my "spouse" to a faculty dinner party. With some trepidation (after all, Alberta is hardly the hotbed of Canadian radicalism, at least not of the left-wing variety), I brought my female partner along. Somewhat to my surprise, people were not merely friendly toward us, but actually vied for our attention all night long. Where did we meet? When did the penny drop for the two of us? Had we thought about having children together? What was San Francisco like, and did we miss it a lot? What did we think of the same-sex spousal-benefits initiative on campus? After eight years as an out lesbian, I had grown accustomed to being treated with puzzled tolerance, so I found this sudden informed interest baffling. Don't get me wrong—my colleagues are wonderful people, but I had no reason to believe they lived completely outside of the casual heterosexism that characterizes everyday life.

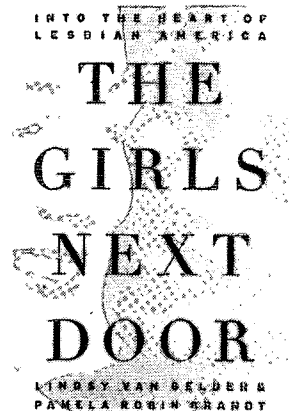
And then it struck me: As out lesbians at a dinner party in the early 1990s, my girlfriend and I were chic. We were part of the social craze over lesbians. Everyone at the dinner party had seen the *Newsweek* cover story about lesbians, and some of them had no doubt read the *New York* magazine feature, too. Good Albertans, a few of them had undoubtedly lingered over the k.d. lang/Cindy Crawford spread in *Vanity Fair*, though they might not admit it. They all knew about *Basic Instinct* even if they hadn't seen it, and *Boys on the Side*, *Fried Green Tomatoes* and *Heavenly Creatures* had filled North American movie theaters. Between the tiramisù and the after-dinner grappa, I realized that lesbian chic was real, and it had cachet in my neighborhood.

All this visibility is good, to a degree. Even if the dykes I know don't exactly measure up to the image of the well-

heeled, highly educated, multicultural, marriage-oriented, deficit-cutting, law- and capitalism-abiding suburban lesbian subject that *Newsweek* has in mind, at least a major mainstream news organ has admitted that lesbians exist. At the same time, lesbian chic makes me nervous, because media representations can function as a strategy of containment, just as medical, psychiatric and religious discourses do. Medical explanations of homosexuality, psychiatric theories of inversion and religious prohibitions against same-sex desire lay claim to a certain knowledge about lesbianism; they give it names, causes, prognoses and, usually, cures. In a similar way, the media render lesbianism visible, knowable and accessible to the world at large. In so doing, they attempt to make it controllable.

Given such misgivings about mainstream media, it was with some relief that I picked up a Firebrand publication, Victoria Brownworth's *Too Queer: Essays from a Radical Life*, and with some apprehension that I approached Simon & Schuster's *The Girls Next Door: Into the Heart of Lesbian America*, by journalists Lindsay Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt. Both books arise from and contribute to lesbian chic, and both address major political debates in the lesbian community: outing, s/m, separatism, racism, genetics, parenting, marriage, monogamy, class, neoconservatism and lipstick.

I assumed, however, that the alternative press would have the more alternative politics—especially with that promising word "radical" right there in the title. "The girls next door," on the other hand, suggests an assimilative celebration of everyday apple-pie America about as radical as Roseanne's lesbian friend. Furthermore, Brownworth, who's written for largely gay and lesbian publications such as the *Windy City Times*, *Deneuve* (now *Curve*), *Southern Voice*, the *San Francisco Bay Times* and the *Lesbian News*, assumes a like-minded readership. By contrast, Van Gelder (chief writer for *Allure*) and Brandt (a musician and columnist for the *New York Daily News*) promise to speak to "readers of all genders and orientations," though they admit to expecting "a certain level of sophistication among our straight readers." The books appear to promise different things: *Too Queer*, a hard-hitting, politically uncompro-



**Too Queer: Essays from a Radical Life**  
By Victoria A. Brownworth  
Firebrand Books  
261 pp., \$13.95

**The Girls Next Door: Into the Heart of Lesbian America**  
By Lindsay Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt  
Simon & Schuster  
314 pp., \$23



mising, radical view of lesbian culture and politics from the inside, and *The Girls Next Door*, a glib tour through LesbAmerica, written with a tourist's thrill of titillation and concomitant didactic zeal.

In a sense, that's what the books deliver. Brownworth has definitely been in all the right political places: at the birth of '70s separatism with *Radicalesbians*, in the direct-action politics of early ACT UP demonstrations, and at the 1993 March on Washington. She's written stories on homeless lesbians and gays as well as condemnations of the White House's AIDS policy. Her politics are overt and radical, by which she means (though she doesn't ever quite say) revolutionary. She believes that there is a queer culture and that it matters, but she's not a separatist. She argues that "all oppression is interconnected ... you can't work against racism, for example, and not address sexism and homophobia, you can't work against poverty and not address literacy and domestic violence and housing reform."

And yet in the end the book falls flat. Although Brownworth covers major queer debates, she frequently has noth-

ing new to say about them. After spending pages and pages rehearsing the pros and cons of outing, for instance, she concludes that it is "a problematic political weapon." She does begin to explore the relationship between sexuality and class—intellectual work that is urgently needed. But in the end, she concludes merely that "class identity is as fundamental and inalterable as sexual identity." Other opinions are similarly inane—for example, her contention that radicalism is partly genetic, "inherent in who we are as individuals," or her assertion that neoconservative dykes really want to be men, or her view that marriage and the military are "inherently heterosexual."

What makes the book hard to dismiss out of hand is Brownworth's political conviction. Yet it's difficult to take diatribe after relentless diatribe seriously after a while. Ultimately, I'm not sure what's excessive about her queerness, what makes her "too" queer, as she calls herself in the book's title. Where's the camp? Desire? Pleasure? Weren't any of her experiences funny? Didn't she ever do a political action just to get the girl? It's as though, for all her investment in the queer community, she's missed out on one of its most important political lessons: that revolution is an outrageous thing to aim for, and best sought in an outrageous way. Without queer flamboyance, Brownworth's radicalism amounts to a prissy liberalism based on adages like living a life of personal integrity or abiding by the golden pluralist rule that "Each lesbian should choose what's right for her and stop judging other women's romantic and sexual choices."

Van Gelder and Brandt, on the other hand, don't pretend to be anything but liberal. In an enviable assignment, their editor gave them the money to spend a couple of years traveling across the United States talking to lesbians of all sorts. They attended major events like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival and the Dinah Shore Golf Tournament and party circuit, and they went on tour with the direct-action Lesbian Avengers. Their subjects range in age from 16 to 70-something, are able-bodied and disabled, urban and rural, and represent many races and social classes. They include both well-known lesbians and unknown dykes. In the spirit of pluralist inclusiveness, the resulting book is organized to describe as many different facets of the lesbian community as possible.

Van Gelder and Brandt are politically committed to civil rights reforms, not direct action or social revolution, but they're up front about it. They value what the Lesbian Avengers do, but are skeptical about its importance: "For every Lesbian Avenger breathing fire," they write, "there are countless women volunteering at their local women's or gay center, or writing checks to the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the Astraea Foundation, NOW, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Lambda Legal Defense Fund, the ACLU's Gay and Lesbian Rights Project, and other work-within-the-system organizations." At the same time,

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their politics are not simple. They do not dismiss same-sex marriage out of hand or embrace it wholeheartedly. Instead, they contextualize it, recognizing that "in middle America ... not much could be *more* radical."

They are careful to differentiate lesbians from both straight women and gay men. While recognizing the complexity of establishing lesbian identities ("Is someone a lesbian if she says so? Is someone a lesbian if she doesn't say so?"), they do exclude from the category "lesbian" women like Camille Paglia (who came out to "almost universal lesbian dismay") and Madonna ("who has shamelessly milked porno-lez imagery in her work, meanwhile insisting to the press that she has never actually done the dirty deed herself").

Flying in the face of a popular, gender-blind conception of queerness, they see lesbians as women first, and then gay; in their view, lesbian culture descends in large part from feminist culture. "One political difference between lesbians and gay men," they write, "is that even the most potentially conservative members of our community—the wealthy, middle-aged, often closeted professional set—consists largely of women whose lives were shaped by the women's movement. That doesn't mean that no lesbian ever voted Republican, but it does mean that our community is philosophically grounded in the notion that 'the personal is political.' To lesbians, how you vote is but a tiny corner of what's 'political.' What you eat, where you spend your money, what you call people, how you dress, even what you do in bed ... all of these things *matter*, because they have *implications* for the vast, intricate web of human life."

This politicization of the everyday notwithstanding, Van Gelder and Brandt can sometimes sound a bit prudish. They don't understand lesbian s/m or lesbians who sleep with men, but they don't pretend to. On the other hand, they have a great sense of humor with a wicked eye for detail. They are ruthless, for instance, about the pretensions of the Dinah Shore circuit. On the image of lesbians as man-hating ball-breakers, they coyly point out that "in our experience, the women who truly hate men are usually those who live with one, but lesbians end up taking the rap." And then there's the story of the hapless confrontation in Michigan between porn recruiters and anti-porn activists, which takes place in front of the beach volleyball game, so the jocks get involved ... you really had to be there.

For all its touristy packaging and pluralist inclusiveness, *The Girls Next Door* ultimately comes off as more radical than *Too Queer* precisely because it's sassier, funnier and more enticing. I feel I know the women they describe. The sheer range of lesbians brought to life by Van Gelder and Brandt defies media control, and that's radical. But maybe it's time to get rid of that old radical/liberal opposition altogether, recognizing it as another strategy of containment. In an election year especially, it becomes even more obvious that we need all the change—reform and revolution—we can get.

Heather Zwicker is a professor of English literature at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.



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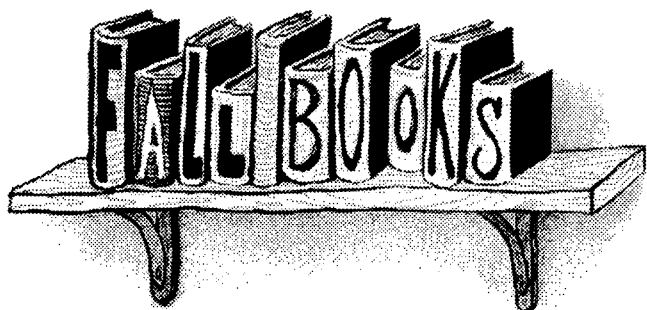
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## Fast forward

By Linda DeLibero

One of the pre-eminent critics of our times, bell hooks is a voice to be reckoned with, not only because her uncompromising perspective is all too rare in cultural criticism but because of the sheer volume and intensity of her output. Hooks churns out essays the way Joyce Carol Oates churns out novels; nothing, it seems, can stanch the flow of words. But such fecundity is a mixed blessing, producing work that's impossible to ignore but wildly uneven. Sometimes, it's as if hooks can't stop herself long enough to think.

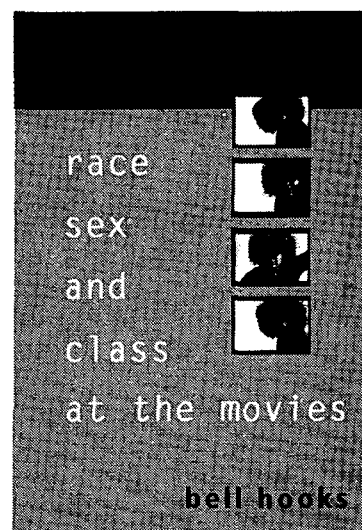
Case in point: In the introduction to *Reel to Real*, her new collection of essays on film, hooks describes rushing home after seeing *Pulp Fiction* and writing about the movie late into the night, unable to let up lest the immediacy of her reactions be lost. The resulting essay—reprinted in *Reel to Real*—illustrates the best and worst of that kind of hit-and-run criticism. It's bracing to read hooks' high-speed indictment of Quentin Tarantino's vision, in which she targets the racist underpinnings of *Pulp Fiction*'s hip cynicism with dead-on accuracy. But while the movie deserves all the abuse hooks heaps on it and then some, it's another matter for her to dub it "neofascist" without explaining what she means by that term. When you finish the essay, you find yourself wishing for something more deliberate, more considered. You want hooks to just *slow down*.

Hooks has trained her guerrilla criticism on a remarkably catholic range of targets. Unlike the cultural studies crowd with whom she's often associated, she has no compunctions about going after the pop icon of the moment. While many feminists were swooning over Madonna, hooks called the Material Girl on her admitted "envy" of blackness, pointing out that white artists' appropriation of black style is often merely colonization in radical chic guise. Hooks has been similarly forthright in her critique of black critical darlings, refusing to jump on the bandwagon for Spike Lee's *She's Gotta Have It*, and more recently skewering the film version of Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale* just as some black feminists were hailing it as a breakthrough. In fact, hooks has remained unapologetically highbrow in her tastes at a time when that stance is distinctly unfashionable in academ-

ic circles. She's a tireless champion of experimental film, unafraid to chastise black audiences for their complacent acceptance of Hollywood and for rejecting independent black filmmakers like Julie Dash and Charles Burnett. While many other critics—both black and white—content themselves with unabashed celebrations of popular culture, hooks sees such adulation as an unacceptable concession for blacks, who, perhaps more than any other group, have been disserved by the stereotypes and clichés of Hollywood. If her demand that filmmakers create complex perspectives on black experience sounds utopian, it's only because it's such a far cry from our current fare.

*Reel to Real* is hooks' second book on images of blacks in mainstream culture. Her first, *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, ranged over a wider field, including television, advertising and literature as well as film. But although the subject matter was more diffuse, the essays were on the whole more fully realized, staking out and clarifying a position on black female subjectivity that was grounded in the concrete details of history and particular experience. *Reel to Real*, on the other hand, is a ragged compendium of previously published work (some of it from *Black Looks*), reviews of recent films, several long dialogues with contemporary filmmakers and an interview with hooks by Marie-France Alderman. In these conversations, hooks' habit of introducing and then abandoning a provocative subject without ever filling in the details is especially prominent. For example, at one point during the interview with Alderman, hooks comments on a moment during the film *What's Love Got to Do with It* when the audience laughed at Tina Turner losing her hair. She expresses anger and fear at a response that renders pathos as farce, but other than venting her feelings she has nothing to say about what might have been going on. It's a ripe opportunity for a critic—especially one concerned with the politics of spectatorship—to inquire further about where such a response comes from and to explore the problematic gap between the "informed" intellectual and her recalcitrant public. Unfortunately, such questions aren't on hooks' agenda.

It is precisely this allegiance to a predetermined agenda that often makes it difficult to distinguish hooks' critiques from



**Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies**

By bell hooks  
Routledge  
256pp., \$16.95

heart, a proselytizer and a provocateur; you can't fault her for her convictions, but in her zeal to convert she's prone to troubling oversimplification. Her dismissal of any audience that doesn't "get" her take on things and her reliance on pat phrases and familiar jargon allow hooks to avoid the hard work of examining specifics that might complicate her picture. Hollywood power relations—all power relations, in fact—are ascribed to "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy," a phrase hooks uses so often it takes on the hypnotic ring of a mantra. But what—and who—exactly does it refer to? Hooks' formula says nothing about who actually exercises power, or to what end. And I've always been puzzled by the use of a word like "patriarchy"—which connotes masculinity in its crudest form—to describe the coldly anonymous dealings of a handful of bankers and power brokers. Hooks' monolithic explanation for the wrongs of the world neatly allows those in control to remain unknown and unknowable, as if the mysterious workings of this invisible elite were an irresistible *fait accompli*. Like the business of tagging *Pulp Fiction* as neofascist, such loaded words allow you to think you know what hooks is talking about, when in fact you haven't learned anything new at all.

Hooks' willingness to wield abstract terms without examining or precisely defining them also leads her into a surprising number of contradictions. She lectures her readers on the importance of history, but her own approach to film is hardly historical. Seldom does she discuss why certain movies—like *Waiting to Exhale*—take hold of a public at a certain historical moment, or how the cultural and political climate can determine moviegoers' expectations. She's mainly interested in recounting her emotional reactions to films and in pushing her own idiosyncratic readings, even when these contradict her political convictions. For example, she's "moved" by the flagrantly bigoted *Falling Down*.

Hooks' take on independent film in particular is guided by a mix of Jungian and psychosexual analysis that places "self-actualization" at the center of meaningful moviegoing. This is a New Age conceit that is profoundly ahistorical and deeply solipsistic. And her determination to read a character's sexual practices (including sadomasochism) as political acts leads her to some major misjudgments. For instance, she praises *Leaving Las Vegas* for its portrayal of a hooker who is empowered through her work. Would this be the same character whose pimp leaves his signature on her buttocks with his knife? A reading like that isn't just bad criticism, it's plain bad moviegoing.

The shortcomings of *Reel to Real* are particularly distressing because hooks has so often been a singular and courageous critical voice, unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom. There's hardly a larger point in the book that she isn't right about. But while hooks forces her reader to confront a number of painful realities about cinema today, she ultimately fails to offer a clear-headed and specific understanding of the complexities of modern spectatorship. Unfortunately, that's a project that demands far more time than hooks seems willing to give.

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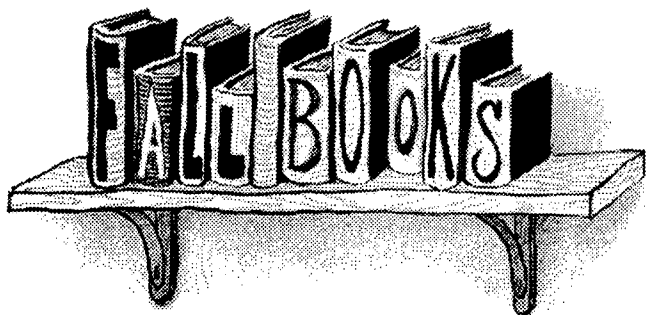
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## Economic tall tales

By Doug Henwood

**"M**any of the most politically powerful ideas about the economy are inspired by a subterranean level of economic understanding that consists not of formal arguments but of images and stories," writes Fred Block in his new book, *The Vampire State*. "This subterranean level exists because modern economies are so complex that they can only be understood through analogies, metaphors and stories."

Why are austerity, downsizing and The Market the ruling ideas of the day? Block traces their popularity to a bad set of myths that celebrate pain and condemn the state. These myths, he argues, have put politicians and pundits in a mind to prescribe, and voters to embrace, the bitterest of medicines.

"For close to a generation," writes Block, "politics in the United States has been dominated by a frenzy of anti-statism—systematic efforts to reduce the role of government in society fueled by an ideology that sees government as inherently wasteful and ineffective." According to Block, we are all gripped by moralizing narratives—the state as vampire sucking blood in the form of capital out of the economy; the Christian Pilgrim who must suffer for redemption. In these metaphors, the message is one of austerity, sacrifice and marketization.

Though these tales emerge from deep within the Protestant culture of Anglo-American capitalism, they have been, writes Block, "used effectively by certain interest groups to define their interests as identical to the general interests of society." The task for us "citizens" is to figure out what's "in the interest of society as a whole." Against those moralizing tales, Block offers a new set, which promise, if not a free lunch, at least one at a sharp discount from advertised prices.

An analysis that makes "analogies, metaphors and sto-

ries" the engine of social change is unlikely to get very far in explaining the epochal shifts of the last 25 years. Block's approach fails on a number of levels. First, he takes the prevailing rhetoric of antistatism at face value. In fact, antistatism is more selective than Block acknowledges. At the same time that deregulation and cutbacks have run wild, so have such state-intensive activities as surveillance and imprisonment. State institutions such as central banks and the International Monetary Fund have vastly increased their influence over economic life in both the First World and the Third. Markets, which in mainstream ideology are as natural as gravity, have frequently been created and deepened through coercive state action—ranging from enclosure (the privatization of common lands) in Britain hundreds of years ago to NAFTA's eviction of Mexican peasants from their land today.

Nor does Block acknowledge the complex social conflicts that lurk behind the simple-minded narratives. His account of the rise from the dead of antistatist ideology is a case in point. He pinpoints that resurrection to the mid-'70s following the deep recession of 1974-75 and the wicked inflation of the rest of the decade. According to Block, stagflation provided the opening for the return to dominance—albeit dressed up in modern guise—of 19th-century liberalism, a mode of political economy dormant since the '30s. With Clinton's embrace of budget-balancing and free trade, that ideological victory is complete.

Fair enough. But since Block analyzes that victory exclusively in terms of rhetoric, he misses almost all the key points. His description of the economic problems of the '70s hardly does justice to how the period was seen by those who used to be called the ruling class. (Like many former Marxists, Block finds it hard to say the word "class.") In their eyes, "inflation" is shorthand for a threatening syndrome whose symptoms include the rising insolence of labor, Third World demands for global redistribution and a sense of general social indiscipline. The propaganda offensive that started in the late '70s was merely one front in a total war; along with it came a phalanx of (often well-disguised) policy offensives like deregulation, union-busting, tight-money policies and budget cuts.

Wallace Stevens called the death of Satan a tragedy for the imagination. So too was the apparent death of Marxism. The "dour turn in Western thought," speculates Block, "seems to be a direct response



**The Vampire State: And Other Myths and Fallacies About the U.S. Economy**  
By Fred L. Block  
New Press  
305 pp., \$23

to the collapse of Marxism as an alternative to the secular pessimism of the Conventional Wisdom." He argues that Marx's narrative derived its rhetorical strength from combining an inversion of orthodoxy's suffering penitent allegory with a Victorian faith in technology and progress. With that happy synthesis, "planning" became one of the central metaphors of Marxism.

Now both planning and optimism seem hopelessly obsolete, not merely because of the Soviet Union's collapse but, argues Block, because technological innovation in the advanced countries has made economic activity seem fundamentally unplannable. "The fatal weakness," he writes, "of that traditional concept of economic planning was hubris—its exaggerated notion of the capacity of human rationality to comprehend and anticipate something as mercurial and dynamic as economic activity."

At least three things seem wrong with this argument. First, there's a great deal of planning involved in capitalist innovation. Corporations put a great deal of money and energy into strategizing about what research to pursue, and they have highly organized R&D labs to carry out the work. Likewise, decisions about what basic research to conduct are heavily influenced by the priorities set by government and a small group of elite foundations and institutes. Second, shouldn't radical social analysis be a bit more critical of the idea of "innovation"? Research priorities often bear little relation to the interests of workers, consumers or nature. And third, it is wrong to reduce Marxism to an embrace of central planning. Marxism has historically been predominantly an analysis of capitalism, not an outline of a planned utopia. Marx himself was deeply immersed in the commercial realities of his day; his theorizing always went hand in hand with rich empirical analysis. Sadly, there's little of that in this book, or in much leftish writing in political economy today for that matter.

Like many former Marxists, Block is now starry-eyed about markets, even as he criticizes their social effects. This results in many strange contradictions. For example, Block explains the crisis of Scandinavian social democracy by saying that it became "extremely difficult to fine-tune ... the growth of the public sector to the precise level needed to adapt to expanding private-sector productivity. Public-sector spending takes on a life of its own, leading to severe fiscal pressures and a rising tax burden on the private sector that causes social and economic strains. All of these resulting conflicts are more difficult to handle precisely because we have sleepwalked our way to adaptation." Yes, a generous welfare state is in fundamental conflict with capitalist economic and social mechanisms, but instead of saying that's so much the worse for capitalism, Block attributes the crisis to the failure to "mov[e] forward to consciously chosen forms of adaptation." Instead of choosing the Conventional Wisdom of orthodox austerity, he concludes, we need a "counter-narrative of conscious adaptation."

To ask a question that recurs incessantly while reading

this book, just who are "we"? Swedes? Americans? Options traders? Bootblacks? Block refuses to acknowledge the very real clash of competing social interests. The shakedown from the embrace of antistatism illustrates that elision clearly. Modern austerity can be dated to the 1975 New York City fiscal crisis, the pioneering creditor-managed political restructuring. The model has since been used on Mexico and Washington, D.C. The broad public was excluded from these restructuring experiences by design; "we" have no place in their boardrooms.

But Block is not so easily deterred. Rejecting both the failed utopia of Marxism and the "earthly pessimism of the Christian allegory," he opts for "a cautiously optimistic belief in the possibilities of social evolution based on the conscious adaptation of societies to changing circumstances." The new order would be "tentative, experimental and democratic," but it would "reduce poverty, inequality and oppression." Adaptation? Is this social Darwinism with a human face? Block never asks who or what makes society's circumstances change. How did the process get naturalized?

In place of the old metaphorical inventory, Block has a new armamentarium: "treasure troves and bargain lunches"—magical bursts in productivity achieved through sensitive re-engineering. Rather than viewing the state as an undead bloodsucker, "we" should see it instead as being like "the flight crew of the Enterprise." Block invokes the Star

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Trek ship itself as an image of "our society ... navigating its way through a dangerous universe on a mission of mining treasures and conscious adaptation." What Federation dispatched this society-crew on its mission? Mining what, where, for whom, at whose expense? Adapting to what, and why? If you're going to propose counter-metaphors, you'd better work them out a bit more carefully than this.

It's hard to be sanguine about Block's alternative vision. If a Block-influenced government were to come to power, it would face the resistance of the financial markets, which are populated by "slaves to the Conventional Wisdom." Block makes it sound like all that would be required to bring them around to a reform program would be a thorough critique of the standard narratives. In real life, it won't be so easy. Convention has served financiers very well; its triumph over the last 20 years has made people on Wall Street oodles of money and vastly expanded their power. When they say unemployment is too low, they do so because they fear having to pay higher wages, not because they're in the grip of bad theory.

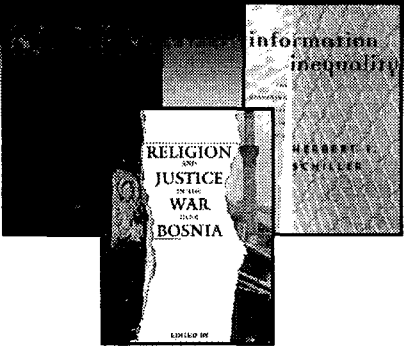
But let's say that Block's reformers have broken free of the financial markets. Now what? Supposedly they would now pursue yet another Third Way, different from both capitalism and socialism, though with features of both. Block's special contribution to utopia design is his notion of "popular entrepreneurialism," a departure from traditionally state-intensive social democratic agendas. (For a book that announces itself as a critique of pro-market antistatism,

it ends up incorporating a lot of what it purports to criticize.) Finance and technical support would be made available to small-scale enterprises—furniture-making shops, restaurants and the like. Worthy pursuits, such as theater and child care, would receive state subsidies, but since paid employment can't be found for all, transfer payments would have to sustain the unemployed. Similarly, rich countries would transfer wealth to poor ones.

Evidently, Block believes that this world could come to pass through the deconstruction of dominant narratives, rather than through nasty political struggle. There's nary a word about institutions like unions or political parties, and hardly a hint of ruling-class resistance, other than the financiers' clinging to bad myths. Block believes in the near-free lunches of win-win scenarios: "In short, there is a scenario in which the processes of adaptation in the developed nations and rising living standards in the developing nations reinforce each other." Contradicting about 200 years of capitalist evidence, Block denies that for some to be rich, others need be made poor.

There's a lot to be said for developing a decentralized non-state socialism, and Block's sketchy vision of flexible collective action has considerable charm. But getting there without fundamentally and explicitly challenging capitalist property relations would be impossible. Life would be sweeter if that weren't the case, but sadly, life just isn't that sweet.

◀ **Doug Henwood** is the editor of the *Left Business Observer* and author of *Wall Street* (forthcoming from Verso).



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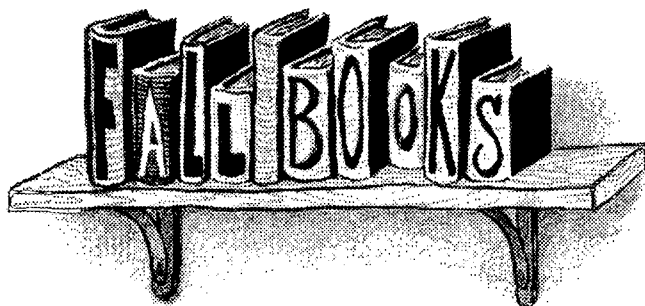
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## High on denial

By Bill Walker

**B**ob Dole doubts that tobacco is addictive. President Bill Clinton inhales only Big Macs. Rep. Susan Molinari (R-NY) lies to her constituents about smoking pot.

Question: What do these individuals have in common? Answer: They are addicted to the politics of denial that permeates the war on drugs.

American drug policy over the last 80 years has done more harm than good; in fact, it is inherently counterproductive. At home, drug prohibition began with the 1914 Harrison Act, a tax measure intended to curb the illegal traffic in opiates and cocaine. In two 5-to-4 decisions in 1919, the Supreme Court affirmed the law's constitutionality and ruled that "maintenance of addicts" was not a legitimate medical practice. Thereafter, officials pursued increasingly punitive policies in an effort to halt the flow of drugs from abroad and end their consumption at home.

No one believed more strongly in the need for a punitive drug policy than the first drug czar, Harry J. Anslinger of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics (FBN), who served as narcotics commissioner from 1930 to 1962. (Among 20th-century officials of comparable rank, only J. Edgar Hoover served longer.) Anslinger enforced a policy that defined addicts, in his words, as "criminals first and addicts afterwards." His agency waged an unrelenting war on drugs and drug users at home and abroad.

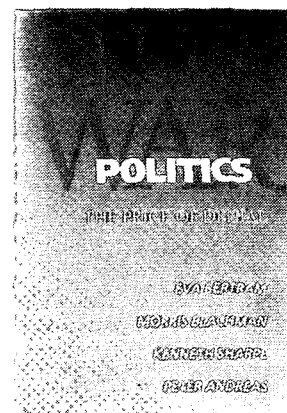
The FBN ultimately failed in its mission, as have its successors, the short-lived Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs and, since 1973, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). But each defeat only brought calls for more of the same. Sufficient willpower, the government seemed to believe, was all that was needed to succeed.

Efforts to control drugs at the source have fared just as badly. The drug war creates irresistible profit incentives (more than \$100 billion annually) for growers, processors, traffickers and dealers. And when the combined efforts of Americans and sympathetic or strong-armed local governments have managed to put a crimp in the drug industries of particular countries, producers have had little difficulty moving elsewhere. Suppress opium production in Turkey, as was successfully done in the '70s, and Mexico gains a greater market share.

Why does the U.S. government so stubbornly persist in policies that have not only failed in their objectives but have exacerbated a host of other social ills, from burgeoning prison populations to deepening racial and class divisions to the sad state of public health? This question is at the heart of *Drug War Politics*, a book whose purpose, say the authors—two political scientists and two graduate students with experience as policy analysts—is "to encourage a more democratic politics ... a more open policy debate" about why the war on drugs has failed.

The book analyzes the linkages between the reigning impulse to punish (what the authors call the punitive paradigm) and the politics of denial. Not only do numerous federal, state and local officials have a vested interest in perpetuating punishment, the authors argue, they also fear rational challenges to the logic of their policy. Their resistance to the unknown leads them to behave as irrationally as the addicts and users they pursue so vigorously. Even modest challenges to established drug policy, like the Carter administration's flirtation with marijuana decriminalization, are regarded as surrender to foreign traffickers and their henchmen here at home. Calls for more funding for treatment and prevention, increasingly common of late, are heeded only if the programs are neither too costly nor seen as challenges to the basic tenets of the drug war.

What alternatives are there to a policy that invariably perpetuates "the very problems it is designed to solve"? *Drug War Politics* considers and rightly, in my estimation, rejects legalization as the main solution to America's drug woes. In spite of its obvious benefits—cutting crime and reducing the profits that accrue from drug trafficking—legalization does not adequately address the social environment that has nurtured the drug culture. Where users live, their employment prospects, and their relations with other individuals and institutions—from



**Drug War Politics:**  
**The Price of Denial**  
By Eva Bertram, Morris  
Blachman, Kenneth  
Sharpe and Peter Andreas  
University of  
California Press  
347 pp., \$17.95

schools to families to the police—all condition both their choice to consume drugs and its consequences. Legalization ignores these external factors in a seemingly private act. As the authors wisely note, expectations about individual responsibility are only as sound as the social environment in which they arise.

The book concludes with a clarion call for citizen involvement in a political struggle to adopt effective treatment and prevention programs. Only the construction of an adequate public health response to the drug problem, the authors argue, can end America's self-destructive quest to extirpate drugs. A broad-based movement is already taking shape. The list of defectors from the drug war among bureaucrats, judges, former DEA agents and many others is truly impressive. Many of these drug war opponents are particularly concerned with the central role of law enforcement in drug policy, with its concomitant expense and intrusiveness. They have rallied around innovative ideas like drug courts, which provide drug offenders who have not committed violent crimes a choice of prison or court-monitored treatment and education programs. One of the main arguments for these courts—which are already operating in Baltimore and Oakland—is that they can save substantial amounts of taxpayer money.

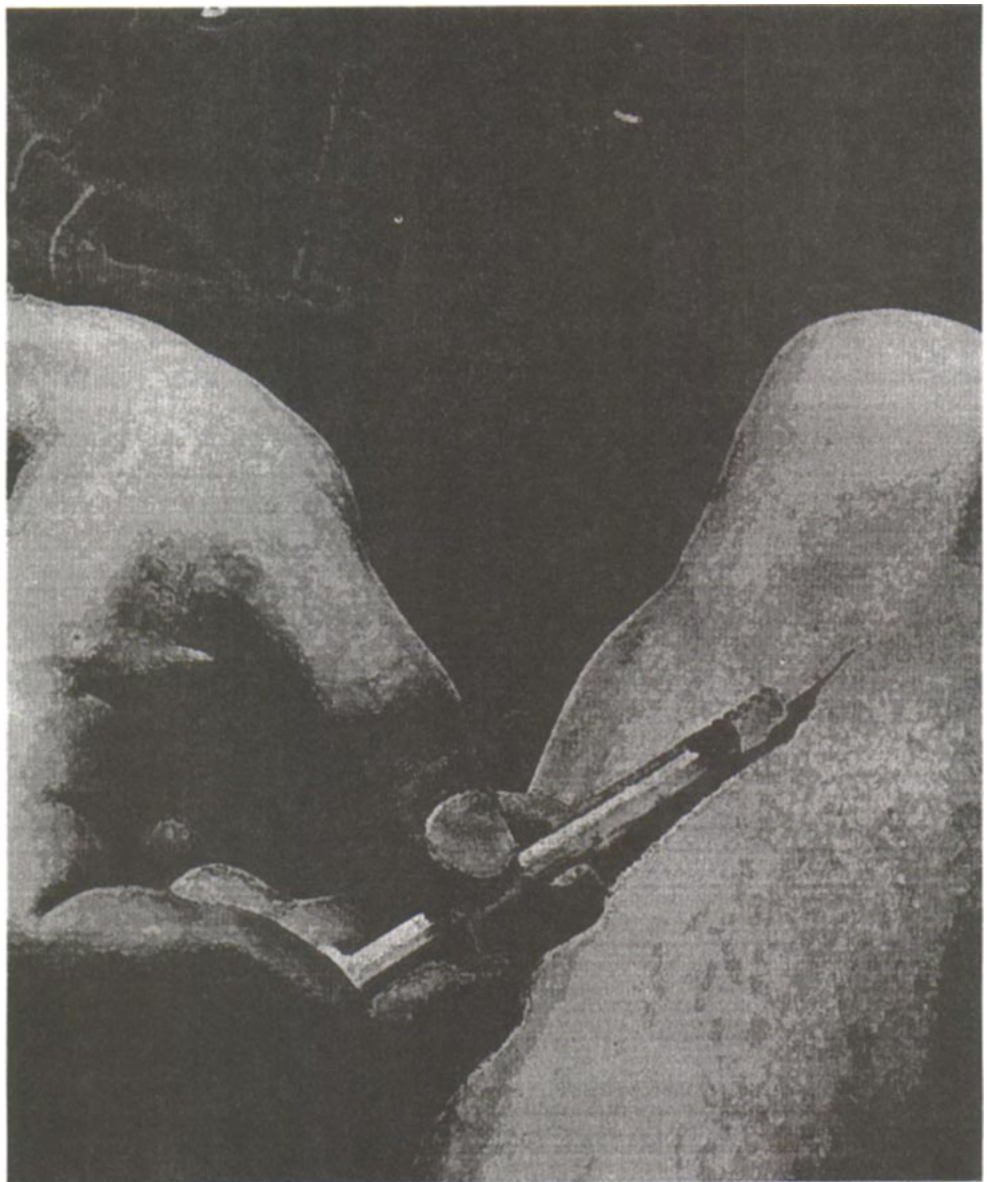
Assuming such a movement does exist, could it win? The authors think so. As models, they point to efforts to improve public health by reducing the consumption of alcohol and tobacco. But how far do these examples really get them? Despite significant improvements in recent years, drinking and smoking remain serious public health problems—far more serious than illegal drugs. From a strict public health perspective, the lesson here might be opposite the one *Drug War Politics* tries to draw.

In any case, the political obstacles to a public health approach to illegal drugs may be insurmountable. Ideally, politicians would feel free to follow their better instincts and devise workable regulations for controlling drug addiction. But few politicians will trade tough talk about

drugs—a sure winner on election day—for something as nebulous as public health. They know that most Americans are not guided by sweet reason when it comes to drugs in their communities.

Nor is the punitive paradigm the only force preventing a thorough rethinking of drug policy. The authors acknowledge—but insufficiently emphasize—that accepting a public health view of drug use requires not just shifting paradigms of drug control, but “challenging the materialist and consumerist tenets of modern capitalism that feed—and are exploited by—the licit and illicit drug markets.” The right to consume drugs—whether cigarettes, Prozac or alcohol—is a deeply felt one in this country. And in a consumer culture, the line between legal and illegal commodities is often a thin one.

*Drug War Politics* also does not adequately come to terms with how race and drug policy intersect. At what point does a drug war whose targets are overwhelmingly



black and Latino become a race war whose pretext is drugs? A practical test of this question is already available in America's inner cities, where aggressive drug law enforcement allows police to stop, search and arrest young men of color virtually at random. Meanwhile, most white citizens remain unconcerned about draconian efforts to root out a practice they often condone in private, because they and their peers are unlikely to be targets. *Drug War Politics*, careful not to offend the officials and activists at whom it is directed, finesses these questions.

The book also fails to consider another important issue, drug supply, as fully as it should. The drug war has been more than a war at home. Ask the *cocaleros*, or coca growers, throughout the Andes who live in fear of repressive state power as they try to make a living. They could reasonably argue that the drug war has been waged against them and their way of life. From their point of view, the war in the United States has been a sideshow to the real conflict. Where, too, would large- and small-scale traffickers fit in a public health approach to drugs? Like most writing about drug policy, *Drug War Politics* misses the importance of this question.

All told, perhaps a million people in the Andes depend on the drug business for their livelihood. Not to assess the effects of major policy change on the stability of Bolivia, Colombia and Peru lends unwitting support to the historic supply-side tactics of crop eradication and interdiction. A program of economic development, including foreign aid

and a reliable market for the region's other exports, would be an essential counterpart to a domestic public health approach to drugs. As Paul B. Stares observes in his recent book, *Global Habit*, the attraction of the drug business abroad "is not going to diminish while the economic prospects of so many people look so bleak."

These misgivings aside, *Drug War Politics* is the best challenge in years to the invidious and arguably unconstitutional war on drugs. Although it is too optimistic about the prospects for radical changes in policy, its debunking of existing truisms about drug control has certainly gotten a response. A recent *New York Times* review of *Drug War Politics* misrepresented the book as being sympathetic to drug legalization and treated the authors with ridicule. That same day, America's paper of record published a misleading story about how drug courts in Scotland have failed. Though the *Times* and other media giants often criticize drug policy, they carefully shy away from advocating radical changes. For anyone with mainstream credibility to preserve, being soft on drugs is the post-Cold War equivalent of being soft on communism.

The Department of Health and Human Services has recently reported a surge in drug consumption among teenagers. Such news will only prolong government addiction to the politics of denial.

Bill Walker teaches at Ohio Wesleyan University and is the editor of *Drugs in the Western Hemisphere: An Odyssey of Cultures in Conflict* (Scholarly Resources).

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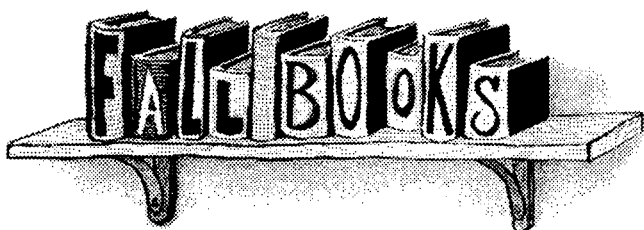
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## Over the top

By Ilan Stavans

Laura Esquivel's best-selling first novel, *Like Water for Chocolate*, not only holds the enviable distinction of having reinvented a whole literary subgenre—the recipe novel—but of single-handedly reviving the Latin American melodrama as well. Set on a hacienda on the U.S.-Mexican border during the peasant revolution of 1910, the book is nominally about a domineering mother and her three daughters. But its real subject—apart from the recipes that head each chapter—is true love, depicted here as an unstoppable, all-conquering force. Throw in a paean to the more mystical aspects of womanhood and a little domesticated fin-de-siècle feminism, and you've got a formula for a best-seller: More than 3 million readers worldwide fell under Esquivel's spell in at least 30 languages. Her international success had two immediate results: It made her an irresistible target for critics, and it elevated her to the status of indisputable master of Latin American melodrama.

While the public adored her, few serious critics could collect enough courage to call Esquivel's book art. Instead, they described it as "overinflated," "manipulative," "farfetched" and "cartoonish." Some accused Esquivel of oversimplifying the lives of Mexican women—her mystical heiresses were hardly the stuff of social realism.

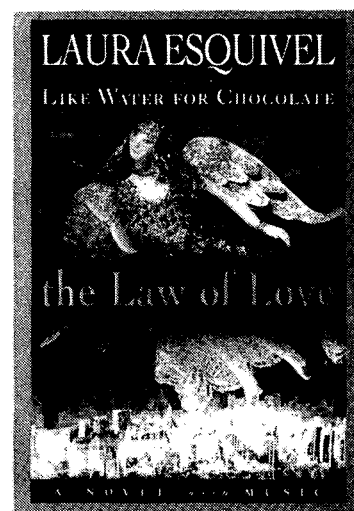
All this is true, of course, but what is melodrama if not an attempt at simplification, a work of extreme theatricality where well-rounded characters take a backseat to the machinery of the plot? For melodrama to be effective, it needs scenes and situations contrived to manipulate the reader's emotions—and emotionally manipulative writing is the one trick Esquivel seems to have mastered. The proof is her second novel, *The Law of Love*, now available in English in Margaret Sayers Peden's translation. But readers enchanted by Esquivel's first book are in for a surprise, for the new one actually goes a step beyond melodrama. It is an ambitious (a better word might be elephantine), often bizarre hybrid unsatisfying not only to the serious critics who could not abide *Like Water for Chocolate* but even to those who are, like myself, enchanted by the intricacies of pulp fiction from south of the Rio Grande. A masquerade of epic proportions, Esquivel's new novel mixes apocalyptic science fiction with the type of New Age esoterics of which

she has lately become something of a guru.

The novel begins in 1523 in the conquered city of Tenochtitlán, the Aztec capital known today as Mexico City. Rodrigo, a Spanish knight married to Isabel, is raping Citlali, an Indian beauty. The scene is filled with Esquivel's trademark emotional excess: Astonishing cruelty is mingled with sex and love, and if that is not enough, soon death and revenge enter the picture as well. Before long Citlali is pregnant with Rodrigo's child, but no sooner is the mestizo baby born than the father, in an uncontrollable fit of rage, kills him and burns the palace in which the delivery took place. In retaliation, Citlali devises a strategy to become a midwife when it is Isabel's turn to deliver one of Rodrigo's children, and once the Iberian baby is in her arms, she "accidentally" stumbles, dropping him to his death.

Implausible? Too farfetched? Well, this is only the first chapter. Next we are taken to the 23rd century, where, we are asked to believe, the fatal triangle of Azucena (formerly Citlali), Rodrigo and Isabel continues by means of an endless chain of transmigrations. By now Azucena is an "astroanalyst," a sort of highly advanced therapist, and is embarked on a hunt for her twin soul, a search that will take her through 14,000 past lives. In the process, she will unravel a macabre plot by a fraudulent reincarnation of Mother Teresa who attempts to use her false identity to become President of the Planet.

If it looks as if Esquivel has run amok, just wait to hear what more there is. Unhappy with what the standard novel as a literary form can offer, she accompanies *The Law of Love* with a variety of textual, graphic and audio accessories. For the \$25 cover price, we get not only a novel but a generous helping of quotes from pre-Columbian Nahuatl poets like Nezahualcōyotl, as well as a CD featuring major arias by Giacomo Puccini ("O Mio Babbino Caro," "Nessun Dorma," etc.) interpreted by the Orquesta de Baja California, and Mexican *danzones* like "Burundanga" by Liliana Felipe. Esquivel wants the reader to turn on the stereo as characters relive their various past lives in order to hear the same things her protagonists are hearing. She also invited the Spanish cartoonist Miguelanxo Prado to illustrate certain passages where one



**The Law of Love**  
By Laura Esquivel  
Translated by Margaret  
Sayers Peden  
Crown Publishers  
288 pp., \$25

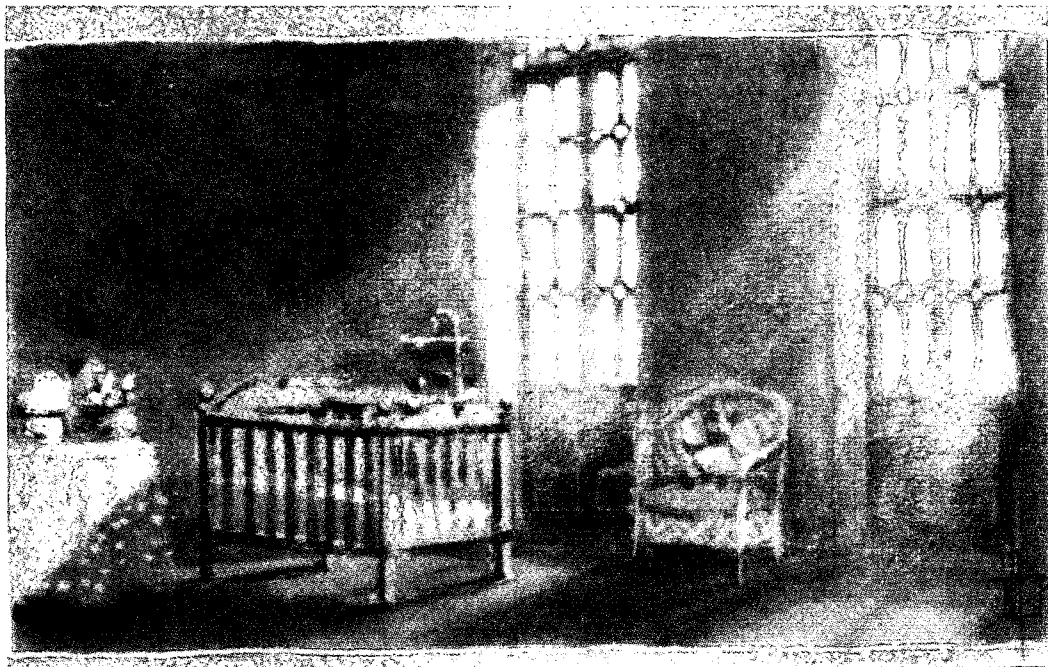
or another of the protagonists has a vision or déjà vu. These dramatic full-color illustrations replace the text for pages at a time.

Esquivel's publisher is promoting *The Law of Love* as an "innovative, thoroughly modern, cosmic love story" and "the very first multimedia novel ever." It's probably too late by now to hope to turn back the multimedia tide; anyway, the real problem with the book is not so much the idea itself as the abysmal gap between concept and execution. As in *Like Water for Chocolate*, the world Esquivel depicts is flat and unrealistic; but if the story is not meant to be read literally, how is it meant to be read? As an attempt at parody? An element of burlesque is certainly present, especially in the many laughs at the expense of Mexico's ruling party and media personalities like Televisa newscaster Jacobo Zabludovsky. But much of the more fantastic material is handled too seriously to be parody: Esquivel discusses characters' former lives as if they were as routine and common as former husbands.

Then there are the cardboard characters. To describe Rodrigo's divided loyalty to Citlali and Isabel, for instance, Esquivel chooses the most infantile of approaches: "He had to divide his body in two separate Rodrigos," she writes. "Each fought for control of his heart, which would completely change according to which of the sides was winning." Her 23rd-century scenes are just excuses to discuss utopian technological devices. And the whole transmigration reverie is simply described as a "a recycling process," without any further elaboration.

Esquivel's New Age mysticism derives, at least in part, from her middle-class Mexican background. She belongs to a generation of Mexicans who came of age in the '70s hypnotized by Orientalism, angered by the repressive atmosphere of the PRI regime and terrified by the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco Square. Among many Mexico City residents of Esquivel's age, the insurmountable pollution and overpopulation in the capital nourished a fever for Jungian philosophy and for the type of mystical experiences made popular by Carlos Castañeda in *The Teachings of Don Juan* and by the surrealist films of Alejandro Jodorowsky. Both Castañeda and Jodorowsky were once compellingly subversive thinkers, but with the yuppie craze of the '90s they have opted to commercialize a form of mysticism that appeals to the Mexican middle class. The result is

an esoterism linking the end of the millennium to the end of the world, explaining history as a struggle between opposing energy fields, and endorsing a kind of transtemporal view of Mexican history in which Aztec past and the post-industrial future are intimately connected. Numerous Mexican novels, comic strips, TV soaps and radio serials have



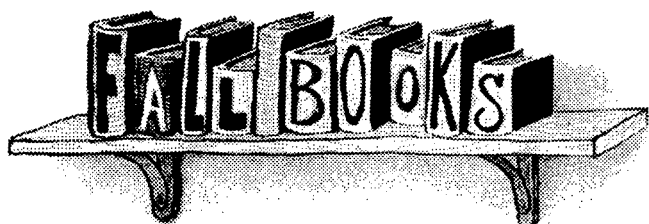
capitalized on this trend; unfortunately, the variant that Esquivel has appropriated in *The Law of Love* is neither well-developed nor original.

For admirers of *Like Water for Chocolate*, it's hard to avoid wondering if the novel's success was simply a matter of luck. Did Esquivel just happen to hit the right note at the right time? Before turning into a celebrity, she was a shadowy screenwriter and the wife of Hollywood actor and director Alfonso Arau, who was responsible for underground classics like *Calzontzin Inspector* and *Mojado Power*. She worked with him on the movie adaptation of *Like Water for Chocolate*, and the collaboration earned them both an immense profit when the film swept the Ariel Awards—the Oscars of Mexico—and went on to become the largest-grossing foreign movie ever released in the United States. But success is seldom all sweet: Half a decade later, Esquivel and Arau are not only divorced but in the midst of an epic legal battle in which Arau stands accused of embezzlement.

Melodrama and excess go hand in hand, but excess, as Manuel Puig—Latin America's last great melodramatist—demonstrated, is best appreciated when combined with restraint. A multimedia novel, part comic strip, part esoteric striptease, part audio-visual spectacle, is fine, so long as it is designed with sense and proportion. In *The Law of Love*, though, too much is finally too much.

◀  
Ilan Stavans teaches at Amherst College. His latest book is *Art and Anger: Essays on Politics and the Imagination* (University of New Mexico Press).





# The King must die

By David Futrelle

Nine or 10 years ago, as a prospective historian just beginning the protracted series of agonies known as graduate school, I picked up a book everyone was talking about at the time: Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, which was, among other things, a savage parody of life within the halls of academe.

I didn't much like the book, but there was one passage that struck me as hilarious, so much so that I went around reading it out loud to friends and acquaintances. In the passage, two colleagues were talking. One had established a center for Hitler studies at DeLillo's imaginary university; the other had an equally ambitious goal of his own:

You've established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own. Nobody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction. ... He is now your Hitler, Gladney's Hitler. ... The college is internationally known as a result of Hitler studies. ... You've evolved an entire structure around this figure, a structure with countless substructures and inter-related fields of study, a history within history. I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly preemptive. It's what I want to do with Elvis.

It's rare that parody is so quickly and completely overtaken by events in the real world. The intentional humor of the original passage has given way to unintentional irony: For better or worse, the discipline of Elvis studies has indeed taken root within academia, becoming a prominent component of the broader movement known as cultural studies.

Once upon a time—in Britain in the late '70s, and for a time afterwards on both sides of the Atlantic—cultural studies was a bold and provocative new discipline, an attempt to look upon the seeming detritus of pop culture with a critical eye. Young scholars at Birmingham's Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies began to develop a politically savvy yet accessible popular sociology. Led by such figures as Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige and Angela McRobbie, the discipline examined in detail the political meanings of British and

American youth cultures, and their deeply conflicted embrace of consumerist pleasures, as well as the politics of scapegoating and social crisis.

But shortly after its transplantation to American soil in the mid-'80s, the discipline of cultural studies seemed to lose its bearings. A fog of jargon descended on the field, and its once-radical message gave way to cautious careerism and an often uncritical celebration of the joys of consumer society. True, a few scholars have managed to produce works of real insight and lasting value—say, Janice Radway's work on romance novels and James William Gibson's writings on American paramilitary culture—but these few nuggets of gold have been nearly buried underneath a mountain of verbiage.

Of all the various subdisciplines that emerged in the wake of the cultural studies explosion—Madonna studies, Michael Jackson studies, Tonya and Nancy studies—the discipline of Elvis studies is perhaps the most prominent, and the most tired. There is, at this late date, very little to say about Elvis that is new or original. And yet the books, like Elvis' terrible '60s movies, keep on coming. I feel like I'm watching one of those interminable *Saturday Night Live* sketches: yes, yes, I got the joke. It wasn't that funny to begin with. Can you please stop now?

Unfortunately, there's no hint that the flood of Elvis glossolalia is about to end any time soon. Indeed, two of the latest additions to the genre, Gilbert Rodman's *Elvis After Elvis* and Karal Ann Marling's *Graceland: Going Home with Elvis*, suggest just how entrenched Elvis studies has become.

Rodman, who teaches communications at the University of South Florida, begins his tribute to Elvis (and to Elvis studies), with the above quotation from DeLillo. I suspect the passage has a different meaning for him than it does for me: I think the joke's on him, while he thinks the joke's on me.

Rodman's book examines, in turn, the topics he calls Elvis Studies, Elvis Myths, Elvis Space and Elvis Culture. Virtually everything Rodman says has been said before—indeed, said many times over: Elvis' emergence as a white boy with "the Negro sound" placed him at the

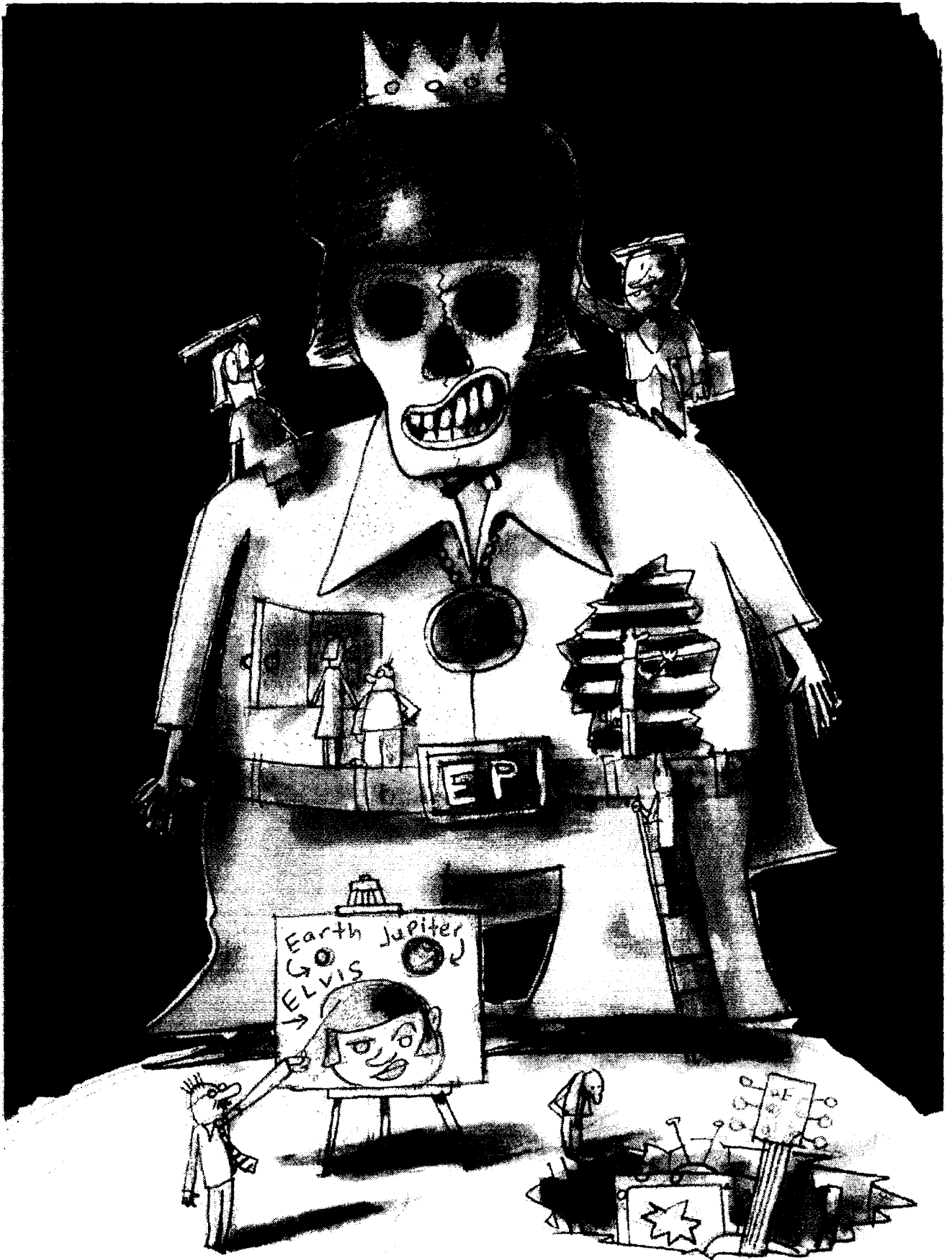


**Elvis After Elvis:**  
**The Posthumous Career**  
**of a Living Legend**  
By Gilbert B. Rodman  
Routledge  
304 pp., \$17.95

**Graceland:**  
**Going Home with Elvis**  
By Karal Ann Marling  
Harvard University Press  
258 pp., \$24.95



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center of America's racial anxieties—and he remains there still. Graceland has become a quasi-religious shrine. Elvis shook up '50s culture in unprecedented ways. Tell me something I didn't know. Indeed, there isn't much insight in the book that couldn't be dreamt up by a couple of grad students in a half-hour of bullshitting after watching an Elvis movie on late-night TV. Rodman has collected what he calls a "file cabinet's worth of assorted 'Elviscera,'" and like some slightly demented neighbor with several boxfuls of vacation slides, he's determined to share it all with us. To be sure, *Elvis After Elvis* isn't quite as irritating as most books in the genre—particularly Greil Marcus' execrably pretentious *Dead Elvis*, which, like Rodman's book, took up "the posthumous career of [the] living legend." Surprisingly, though—especially considering its publisher—the book is largely free of jargon. Not entirely, of course: At one point Rodman describes Elvis as the "point of articulation around which a new *cultural formation* ... could come into existence."

Rodman proves once again that, as they say, Elvis is everywhere. But devoting a book to proving that Elvis shows up in the darndest places contributes little to American cultural history—even if you make a few references to Adorno and Baudrillard along the way.

Karal Ann Marling's *Graceland* is a much more substantial book than Rodman's, an unhurried voyage into the dark heart of Elvisland. Whether she is examining a Beale Street portrait studio where Elvis had a glamour shot taken while in high school, or taking us into Graceland's Jungle Room, Marling has a wonderful eye for detail and a sharp sense of what these details mean. Recounting Vernon Presley's defense of his son's odd excesses, Marling subtly conveys Vernon's defensive pride in Elvis' achievement. Sure, Elvis once shot his television. "But he was in his own home and shot out his own TV," Vernon explained, "and when he'd done it he could afford to buy a new one."

Marling is not interested only in Elvis; she is interested in the world around him and how Elvis and Elvismania fit within that wider context. Indeed, the most insightful and interesting portions of her book don't have much to do with Elvis at all. Before leading us on a tour of Graceland proper, she takes us into the austere home of William Faulkner in nearby Oxford, Miss.—a kind of anti-Graceland, bereft of televisions and radios and the other accoutrements of the Elvis age. Faulkner himself seems a kind of anti-Elvis: In 1957, just as Elvis was tasting his first success, Faulkner complained that "there is not one place in 50 miles that I have found where I can eat any food at all without having to listen to a juke box."

Had it not been preceded by a decade worth of academic Elvisizing, Marling's book might have provided an interesting contribution to cultural history. Now, despite its occasional insights, it seems a little redundant. By this time, surely, we've seen (and perhaps bought) Black Velvet Elvis paintings and Elvis ashtrays and playing cards; we've laughed at the dancing Elvii at the Statue of Liberty centennial celebra-

tion and the flying Elvii of *Honeymoon in Vegas*. One wonders why Marling, a perceptive cultural historian who has written on subjects ranging from the aesthetics of '50s culture to the politics of nostalgia, has bothered to add yet another book to the already overcrowded Elvis shelf.

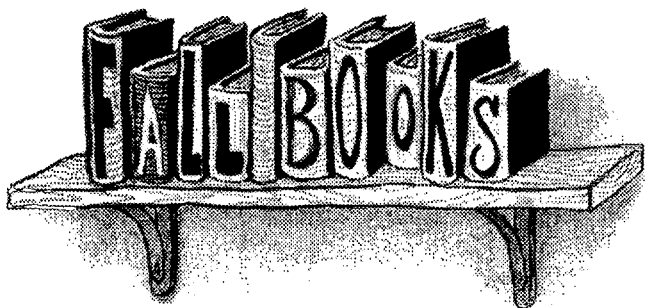
Her book, as much as Rodman's, is a product of contemporary academic Elvismania—she wrote the book while teaching an Elvis seminar at the University of Wyoming and received some of her travel funds from (of all places) *Minnesota's Journal of Law and Politics*. Which raises the question: Just why has this academic fascination with Elvis persisted for so long? The inherent intrigue of Elvismania in our popular culture can only begin to explain the remarkable, and disproportionate, academic interest in the phenomenon. After all, there are many other cultural figures of comparable influence—John Wayne, say—who have not received anything close to the same attention.

But Elvis still has a kind of bad-boy allure. Though by now the discipline is nearly as institutionalized as women's studies was a decade or so ago, Elvis studies still offers a whiff of the transgressive. Elvis scholars love to flaunt their daring in front of cultural conservatives and other skeptics: look, Ma! I'm studying the king of white trash—and they're paying me for it!

This seeming embrace of the lowbrow disguises the elitism at the heart of much Elvis scholarship. Elvis may be tacky, but he is also safe: A properly highbrow appreciation of the man and the phenomenon can be both populist and patronizing at the same time. "Sophisticated" Elvis fans can appreciate him as kitsch and art at the same time. To be sure, the Elvis scholar's status as fan protects him or her from most accusations of snobbery. But Elvis scholars maintain a certain ironic distance from their subject: They love Elvis, in their own sort of way, but unlike some of his more déclassé fans, they aren't going to grow their own sideburns out or pray to the Jumpsuited One as a kind of pagan god.

One senses a certain defensiveness in much of the contemporary Elvis scholarship, a nagging feeling that perhaps the critics are right when they say there isn't much there. And so it is hardly surprising that Elvis scholars routinely inflate the importance of their subject in absurd ways, waxing lyrical about Elvis' role as the "point of articulation" around which all of contemporary culture turns. Hence Rodman's ludicrous conclusion, presenting Elvis as perhaps the most important figure in postwar American life. "At the heart of the lives that we share with one another ... is the dream that Elvis whispered in a nation's ear," he writes, "the dance so strong it took an entire civilization to forget it ... a new way of walking and a new way of talking. And thus, in the end, the culture that we reinvent for ourselves on a daily basis doesn't just belong to us: it belongs to Elvis."

To which one can only respond: Grow up. Move on. Nothing to see here. Elvis is dead. He's over. Elvis has left the building—and perhaps now it's time to turn out the light.



## Savage realities

By Jean Bethke Elshtain

Given the mounds of bodies on which human societies rest, the fact that war studies is relegated to military colleges or to the occasional chair in military history is a scandal. No doubt there are various institutional reasons for this divide, but it's equally certain that scholars, like the rest of us, are reluctant to view war as one of the fundamental, universal characteristics of human societies. Yet universal it certainly is.

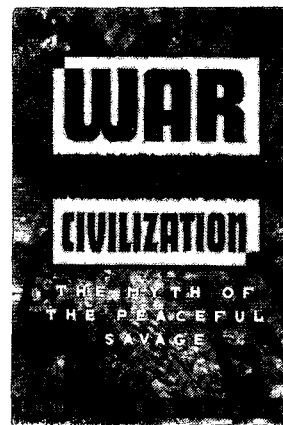
Those scholars who have grappled with the ubiquity of war can be broadly divided into two camps, each with its foundational myth. On one side are the believers in progress, whose vision of history is a steady (if sometimes interrupted) advance of human happiness and well-being. The past, from this perspective, is an "ignorant" and "miserable" period that we're well rid of. If this is our take on things, Thomas Hobbes' bleak depiction of the state of nature—humankind's pre-civil condition—as a war of all against all seems plausible. On the other side are those more enamored of the golden age, an idea usually associated with Rousseau. For them, the high point of human happiness lies not in the future but in the past: They seek, and often find, their paradise in prehistory, before people invented gunpowder, undertook arduous journeys of discovery and created complex political entities called states. If one holds this point of view, one is unlikely to pay much attention to ancient fortifications and neolithic skulls pierced by arrowheads or to the vulnerability of human flesh to spears, axes and stones.

Lawrence Keeley, a professor of anthropology at the University of Illinois, Chicago, is an archaeologist, and his new book, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage*, is an impassioned polemic against the golden age

camp, which has long held the upper hand in anthropology departments. He charges his opponents with artificially "pacifying the past" and with a "pervasive bias against the possibility of prehistoric warfare." The great strength of the book is that Keeley permits the humble detritus of the past—"bones, seeds, stones, metal and pottery"—to instruct the present. There is, after all, an "extremely physical and material nature" to the things archaeologists study. This stuff of past life demonstrates beyond reasonable doubt that warfare was pervasive in that time we call prehistoric. Reminding us that "recorded history represents less than half of 1 percent of the more than 2 million years that humans have existed," Keeley insists that in any assessment of human nature the vast preliterate history of humankind must weigh at least as heavily as the patina of "civilization" that follows it.

War, Keeley writes, is not like a natural disaster. It is a social institution that answers to a variety of needs, often quite successfully. When we credit "civilized warfare" with being motivated and goal-oriented, no matter how much we deplore it, and romanticize primitive warfare as primarily "symbolic" or "ritualistic," we do a major injustice to the humanity of ancient men and women. It might be nice if primitive people were peace-loving flower children, whose cultures had known nothing but millennia of harmony before modern civilization came along to spoil things. But the evidence tells another tale: "Warfare has been extremely frequent among primitive societies." Indeed, according to statistical samplings discussed by Keeley, some 65 percent of "non-state societies" were continually at war.

Primitive warfare was not only more frequent than modern warfare but often more destructive. The importance of primitive war is often obscured by the small size of the social units involved, which blurs the line between war and murder or other forms of private killing. Anthropologists who believe in essentially pacific primitive societies have sometimes used this semantic confusion to argue that modern societies would actually appear much more violent than primitive ones if deaths inflicted in war were counted with murders. But, as Keeley points out, to equal the homicide rate of the Gebusi, a modern-day tribal group in New Guinea, the United States would have had to kill the *entire population* of Vietnam during the nine years of war there. Nor is there any reason to believe that such rates of violence were any less



**War Before Civilization:  
The Myth of the Peaceful  
Savage**

By Lawrence H. Keeley  
Oxford University Press  
245pp., \$25





morally required and what is permitted in the course of war. His conclusion fits with the rest of his argument: If war is the outcome of the rational but shortsighted competition between political or social units, the solution is a single state or community "encompassing the whole world." But how is this to be brought about? As a solution to the problem of warfare it seems, anyway, incompatible with Keeley's own insistence that social contact and closeness of relations often engender conflict. Those we are nearest to are often those we come to despise.

Despite these caveats, the book is a welcome addition to the literature on war. If Keeley is right that "in the beginning there was war," our attachment to the idea of the "peaceful savage" requires some explanation. It's not surprising that we would want to think well of our ancestors. But the persistent denial of widespread prehistoric warfare must have at least as much to do with most academics' preference for recondite theories that reside somewhere in the stratosphere over the sedimented layers of physical evidence ready at hand if we look for them.

"The burned villages, the arrowheads embedded in bones, the death tolls and the mutilated corpses," writes Keeley, "speak more truthfully, more passionately on this dismal subject than all the recorded verbiage of the living, which is riddled with cant, sophistry and flights of fancy." Here's an empiricist who still feels the old religion! But in insisting on the primacy of physical evidence, Keeley is doing more than defending his

common in the past. Many pre-Columbian villages in North America show evidence of almost uninterrupted raids and massacres, often claiming the lives of 10 to 20 percent of the population. At one 14th-century site in South Dakota, the mutilated remains of more than 500 of a village's estimated 800 inhabitants were found amid the burned remnants of their houses. The survivors appear to have been mostly young women (their bones are underrepresented in the mass grave) who presumably were carried off as captives. In constructing his case, Keeley systematically amasses and analyzes hundreds of such examples. His only slightly facetious conclusion: "The most important and universal rule of war [is], do not lose."

Despite his meticulous scholarship and attention to detail, Keeley occasionally missteps when his rigorously empirical, no-nonsense approach blinds him to some of the more subtle nuances of warfare. He underplays the role women have played in war, not as combatants but, for instance, as "Spartan Mothers" who bear sons so that "they may die for Sparta." He fails to give a sufficiently robust account of efforts to bring warfare to heel by codifying and regulating it. He does discuss the *results* of such efforts, but shows little interest in the centuries of debates about when war is justifiable or even

methodological turf. He's struggling against what E. P. Thompson called "the enormous condescension of posterity." Keeley argues that as groups of people preoccupied with material needs and physical safety—not the ritual and symbolic concerns most anthropologists prefer to talk about—ancient societies were fundamentally similar to modern ones. "The myths of either primitive or civilized superiority," he writes, "deny the intellectual, psychological and physiological equality of humankind. In fact, the proponents of the pacified past disclaim the idea that all peoples share a common nature by denying that all societies are capable of using violence to advance their interests." Though its political program is an odd mix of too little (be careful how you treat your trading partners) and too much (mega-empire or world federation), this is a hard-hitting volume that doesn't let us forget that human societies consist not only of bodies of ideas but of physical realities. In thinking about the past, Keeley suggests, we would do well to keep our theories less grand and our noses closer to the ground.

◀ **Jean Bethke Elshtain** is Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago. Her most recent book is *Democracy on Trial* (Basic Books, 1995).

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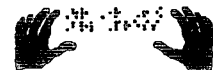
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*Continued from page 48*

expanded their market share by almost a quarter between 1991 and 1995, from 22.1 percent to 26.2 percent. Over the same four-year period, independents watched their market share slip from 32.5 percent to 19.5 percent. (Mail-order houses and mass market outlets account for most of the rest.)

"Everybody understands it to the extent that they've seen it happen before. They've seen it happen with the family farm and with the family grocery store. They've seen it happen with the dynamic of the community and neighborhood economies," says Richard Howorth, vice president of the ABA and owner of Square Books in Oxford, Miss., for 17 years. "If books go the way of everything else, then there is nothing left to hope for."

But the space that Barnes & Noble occupies—both physically and in the public mind—is so comfortable that it's hard for most people to take such warnings seriously. As Barnes & Noble's Herling says, they want to make bookstores "exciting, inviting and fun" for a demographic that doesn't respond to fluorescent lighting and an "if you paid full price..." sales pitch. So Leonard Riggio, the chain's founder and a very good businessman, has always been willing to experiment with departures from the standard book-selling formula—shopping carts, books by the pound—to find out exactly what the public wants in a bookstore.

Then he struck gold. *We don't want a department store that makes us feel like proletarians at McDonald's for a value meal. We're intellectuals: We want something upscale, with just a hint of personality and a touch of funk and subversion.*

We want culture.

Just ask author and *Nation* editor Victor Navasky. His op-ed piece in the *New York Times* three months ago opened with a confession: "[W]hile giving lip service to the idea of independent shops like Shakespeare & Company ... I have been buying most of my books from Barnes & Noble, whose two new superstores have come down on my old neighborhood shop like the Assyrians who came down like the wolf on the fold." He liked the superstores not for their "yuppie trappings," he assured the skeptics, but because they encouraged taking private space into the public sphere.

Independent booksellers openly expressed their disgust. In a letter to Navasky, Andy Ross of Cody's in Berkeley wrote: "Retail bookselling in America is the primary engine for the distribution of ideas in our culture. ... Many of America's great writers were discovered and promoted by independent stores and ignored by chains until their reputations developed. Without early support by independents, such writers as Barbara Kingsolver, Allen Ginsberg, Carlos Castañeda, Tom Robbins, Russell Banks, Erica Jong, Alice Walker, Wallace Stevens, Richard Ford, Noam Chomsky, Toni Morrison, Alexander Cockburn—yes, and Victor Navasky—would never have found their audience."

The real threat to independents, though, comes not from the Navaskys of the world but from the stacks of best-sellers

heaped in the front of every superstore. While publishers are willing to pay any bookstore for favorable placement, in practice the money goes overwhelmingly to chains. Each book in prominently positioned dump-bins can net a chain \$120,000 a year, according to a *New York Times* article earlier this year. In Barnes & Noble's case, publishers can shell out another \$150,000 for inclusion in the "Discover Great New Writers" series, which includes front-window placement in all superstores for two or three months and a review of the book in the chain's in-house journal. The program purports to offer an introduction to the "best books being published [sic] this summer" and "some of the finest writers on today's literary [sic] scene." I particularly liked the review of *Derby Dugan's Depression Funnies*, where the narrator "roams the city in the company of a cartoonish assortment of mobsters, communists, writers and other eccentrics."

But if you're not in the mood for whatever "writers and other eccentrics" are producing these days, there's always music, software and gourmet coffee. Enjoy a \$4 frappuccino at 66th Street under a mural of 31 authors painted all whites and creams, with an ashen Langston Hughes thrown in for good measure. Shakespeare & Co.'s Kurland demurs: "I'm not sure that a better bookstore should be a cafe. It just seems like this huge concession to American consumerism. People are buying the sizzle." It seems oddly appropriate that the site where Chelsea's Verso Books once stood is now occupied by a Starbucks.

In the end, though, the most serious objection to chains is not the atmosphere, but the danger that as decisions about bookselling are concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, authors deemed inappropriate or outside the mainstream will find themselves excluded from bookstores. This happens more literally in some cases than in others.

When Thom Jones, the author of *The Pugilist at Rest* and *Cold Snap*, traveled to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in July to do a reading at a Barnes & Noble, he was greeted by rude employees who, unfamiliar with his work, told him to go to the children's section for the reading even after he explained that the story contained profanity. Sure enough, after the first "motherfucker," two men who weren't in the audience—one of them, he later learned, a state trooper—started talking louder. One of them snapped at him, "Why don't you just shut up, mister?" "If you've got a story about a hot golf game or a big fish," Jones asked them nicely, "why don't you come over here and tell everybody about it?"

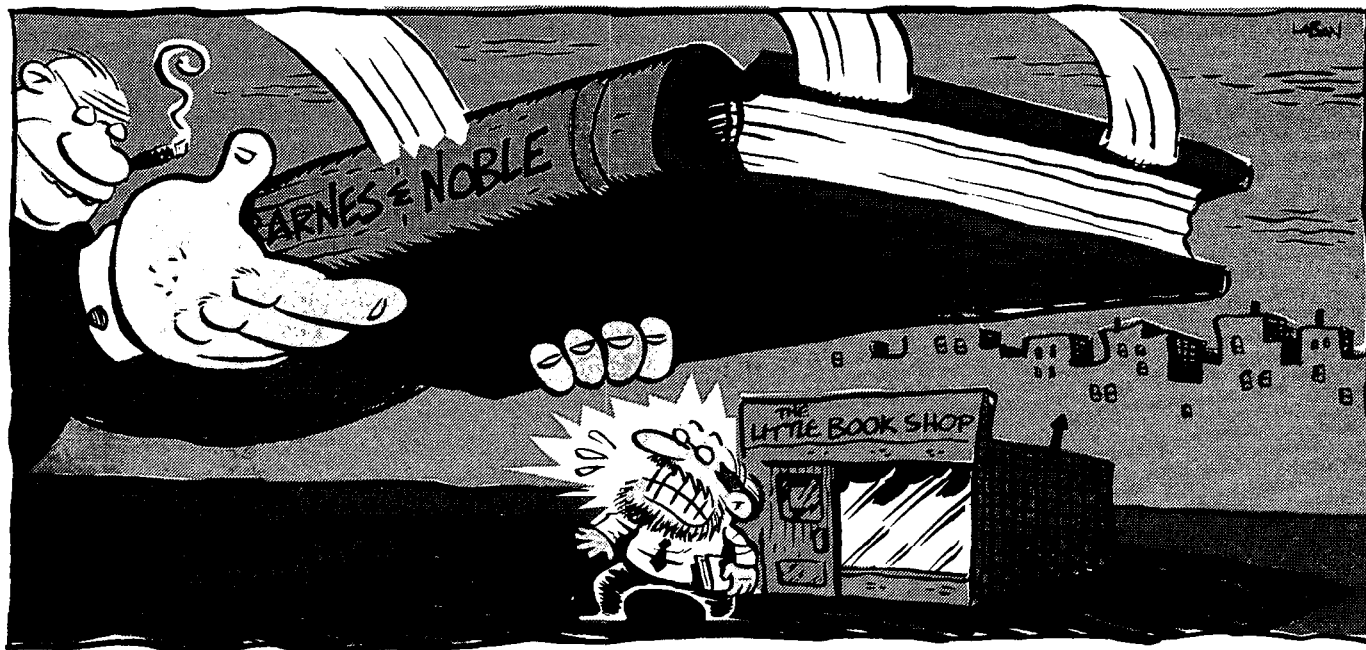
When the men continued their conversation and the Barnes & Noble staff made no move to quiet them, Jones resorted to violence: He threw a book at them. Then he threw another. With one paragraph to go, a clerk—"this fellow in a little vest. He could have been working anywhere," says Jones—came up and announced that he was placing him under citizen's arrest. When Jones refused to leave, the clerk said, "Somebody call the police."

As they say, the customer is always right. ◀

Mandy Stadtmiller is a freelance writer based in Chicago.

# IN THE END

## Survival of the biggest



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By Mandy Stadtmiller

It's a Saturday night in New York and another independent bookseller is closing down on the Upper West Side. You can tell from the "Marauding Megastore" commentary posted in the window alongside the bright pink signs reading "Inventory Clearance," "All Sales Final," and "Bookcases for Sale." Only Tiger, the gray tabby nestled inside the empty children's classics box, seems unmoved by the half-empty shelves and flea-market chaos. After a decade and a half of business in the literary-minded heart of Manhattan, Shakespeare & Co. is closing its doors.

But not to worry. Within 10 minutes' easy walk, there's not one but two new Barnes & Noble superstores. To the south, the 11-month-old Lincoln Center store sprawls out over six levels and 60,000 floral-patterned square feet, making it one of the five largest Barnes & Nobles in the country. Up north, the 82nd Street store is only half the size, but still dwarfs its neighbors. The omnipresent "Since 1873" logo is off by about 120 years; the store opened in April 1993—a fact easily discerned from the trail of collapsed independents in its wake. First, Eeyore's Books for Children at Broadway and 79th Street closed down. Then last summer, Endicott Booksellers at Columbus Avenue and 81st Street announced it was going out of business. Meanwhile, across town on the Upper East Side, the Burlington Book Shop on Madison Avenue went under, overwhelmed by its own next-door superstore.

Since 1992, Barnes & Noble has opened a total of seven

superstores in New York City. Over the same period, seven major independents have closed their doors. You needn't be a conspiracy theorist to see a connection. This will be the pattern as long as huge chain stores continue to muscle their way into neighborhoods whose small bookstores do not have the same leverage with publishers nor the financial wherewithal to indulge people's God-given right to plush chairs and high-powered air conditioners.

In a New York Times article on the Endicott and Burlington closings last July, Lisa Herling, vice president of corporate communications for Barnes & Noble, danced around charges that the chain deliberately surrounds independents—especially venerable ones like Shakespeare—in order to squeeze them out. "Our goal is to keep focused on the needs of customers," she said. "They decide every day where they want to shop." Today she sticks to the same line: "Judging from the success of the store, we think we read neighborhoods pretty well."

Shakespeare & Co. co-owner Bill Kurland reluctantly agrees. "In many ways, we are a bellwether store," he says. "We're the first to go. If at the center of publishing you can't survive, you wonder what will happen around the country. A lot of the independents are under siege right now."

According to the American Booksellers Association (ABA), chains such as Barnes & Noble, Borders and Crown

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